

Classic Poetry Series

Anacreon
- poems -

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Anacreon(570 BC – 488 BC)

Anacreon ((570 BC – 488 BC) was a Greek lyric poet, notable for his drinking songs and hymns. Later Greeks included him in the canonical list of nine lyric poets.

Anacreon wrote all of his poetry in the ancient Ionic dialect. Like all early lyric poetry, it was composed to be sung or recited to the accompaniment of music, usually the lyre. Anacreon's verses were primarily in the form of monody, which means that they were to be performed by a single voice rather than by a chorus.

In keeping with Greek poetic tradition, his poetry relied on meter for its construction. Metrical poetry is a particularly rhythmic form, deriving its structure from patterns of phonetic features within and between the lines of verse. The phonetic patterning in Anacreon's poetry, like all the Greek poetry of the day, is found in the structured alternation of "long" and "short" vowel sounds. The Ionic dialect also had a tonal aspect to it that lends a natural melodic quality to the recitation. Anacreon's meters include the anacreonteus.

The Greek language is particularly well suited to this metrical style of poetry but the sound of the verses does not easily transfer to English. As a consequence, translators have historically tended to substitute rhyme, stress rhythms, stanzaic patterning and other devices for the style of the originals, with the primary, sometimes only, connection to the Greek verses being the subject matter. More recent translators have tended to attempt a more spare translation which, though losing the sound of the originals, may be more true to their flavor. A sample of a translation in the English rhyming tradition is included below.

Themes and subjects of Anacreon's poetry

Anacreon's poetry touched on universal themes of love, infatuation, disappointment, revelry, parties, festivals, and the observations of everyday people and life. It is the subject matter of Anacreon's poetry that helped to keep it familiar and enjoyable to generations of readers and listeners. His widespread popularity inspired countless imitators, which also kept his name alive.

Anacreon had a reputation as a composer of hymns, as well as of those bacchanalian and amatory lyrics which are commonly associated with his name. Two short hymns to Artemis and Dionysus, consisting of eight and eleven lines respectively, stand first amongst his few undisputed remains, as printed by recent editors. But hymns, especially when addressed to such deities as

Aphrodite, Eros and Dionysus, are not so very unlike what we call "Anacreontic" poetry as to make the contrast of style as great as the word might seem to imply. The tone of Anacreon's lyric effusions has probably led to an unjust estimate, by both ancients and moderns, of the poet's personal character. The "triple worship" of the Muses, Wine and Love, ascribed to him as his religion in an old Greek epigram (Anthol. iii.25, 51), may have been as purely professional in the two last cases as in the first, and his private character on such points was probably neither much better nor worse than that of his contemporaries. Athenaeus remarks acutely that he seems at least to have been sober when he wrote; and he himself strongly repudiates, as Horace does, the brutal characteristics of intoxication as fit only for barbarians and Scythians (Fr. 64).

Of the five books of lyrical pieces by Anacreon which the Suda and Athenaeus mention as extant in their time, we have now but the merest fragments, collected from the citations of later writers.

A collection of poems by numerous, anonymous imitators was long believed to be the works of Anacreon himself. Known as the Anacreontea, it was preserved in a 10th century manuscript which also included the Palatine Anthology. The poems were published in 1554 with a Latin translation by Henry Estienne, known as Stephanus, but little is known about the origins of the manuscript. Salmasius reports seeing the Anacreontea at the library in Heidelberg in 1607. In 1623, it was given to Pope Gregory XV after the sacking of Heidelberg. It was later taken from the Vatican City by Napoleon in 1797, who had it rebound as two separate volumes. One of those volumes was returned to Heidelberg but the other remained in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

In the 17th century, Thomas Stanley translated the Anacreontea into English verse. A few poems were also translated by Robert Herrick and Abraham Cowley. The poems themselves appear to have been composed over a long period of time, from the time of Alexander the Great until the time that paganism gave way in the Roman Empire. They reflect the light hearted elegance of much of Anacreon's genuine works although they were not written in the same Ionic Greek dialect that Anacreon used. They also display literary references and styles more common to the time of their actual composition.

And Now With All Thy Pencil's Truth

And now with all thy pencil's truth,
Portray Bathyllus, lovely youth!
Let his hair, in lapses bright,
Fall like streaming rays of light;
And there the raven's die confuse
With the yellow sunbeam's hues.
Let not the braid, with artful twine,
The flowing of his locks confine;
But loosen every golden ring,
To float upon the breeze's wing.
Beneath the front of polish'd glow,
Front, as fair as mountain-snow,
And guileless as the dews of dawn,
Let the majestic brows be drawn,
Of ebon dies, enrich'd by gold,
Such as the scaly snakes unfold.
Mingle in his jetty glances,
Power that awes, and love that trances;
Steal from Venus bland desire,
Steal from Mars the look of fire,
Blend them in such expression here,
That we by turns may hope and fear!
Now from the sunny apple seek
The velvet down that spreads his cheek;
And there let Beauty's rosy ray
In flying blushes richly play;
Blushes, of that celestial flame
Which lights the cheek of virgin shame.
Then for his lips, that ripely gem
But let thy mind imagine them!
Paint, where the ruby cell uncloses,
Persuasion sleeping upon roses;
And give his lip that speaking air,
As if a word was hovering there!
His neck of ivory splendour trace,
Moulded with soft but manly grace;
Fair as the neck of Paphia's boy,
Where Paphia's arms have hung in joy.
Give him the winged Hermes' hand,

With which he waves his snaky wand;
Let Bacchus then the breast supply,
And Leda's son the sinewy thigh.
But oh! suffuse his limbs of fire
With all that glow of young desire,
Which kindles, when the wishful sigh
Steals from the heart, unconscious why.
Thy pencil, though divinely bright,
Is envious of the eye's delight,
Or its enamour'd touch would show
His shoulder, fair as sunless snow,
Which now in veiling shadow lies,
Remov'd from all but Fancy's eyes.
Now, for his feet-but hold-forbear
I see a godlike portrait there;
So like Bathyllus! -sure there's none
So like Bathyllus but the Sun!
Oh! let this pictur'd god be mine,
And keep the boy for Samos' shrine;
Phoebus shall then Bathyllus be,
Bathyllus then the deity!

Anacreon

As Late I Sought The Spangled Bowers

As late I sought the spangled bowers,
To cull a wreath of matin flowers,
Where many an early rose was weeping,
I found the urchin Cupid sleeping.
I caught the boy, a goblet's tide
Was richly mantling by my side,
I caught him by his downy wing,
And whelm'd him in the racy spring.
Oh! then I drank the poison'd bowl,
And Love now nestles in my soul!
Yes, yes, my soul is Cupid's nest,
I feel him fluttering in my breast.

Anacreon

Beauty

Horns to bulls wise Nature lends;
Horses she with hoofs defends;
Hares with nimble feet relieves;
Dreadful teeth to lions gives;
Fishes learn through streams to slide;
Birds through yielding air to glide;
Men with courage she supplies;
But to women these denies.
What then gives she? Beauty, this
Both their arms and armour is:
She, that can this weapon use,
Fire and sword with ease subdues.

Anacreon

Count Me, On The Summer Trees

Count me, on the summer trees,
Every leaf that courts the breeze;
Count me, on the foamy deep,
Every wave that sinks to sleep;
Then, when you have number'd these
Billowy tides and leafy trees,
Count me all the flames I prove,
All the gentle nymphs I love.
First, of pure Athenian maids
Sporting in their olive shades,
You may reckon just a score,
Nay, I'll grant you fifteen more.
In the sweet Corinthian grove,
Where the glowing wantons rove,
Chains of beauties may be found,
Chains, by which my heart is bound;
There indeed are girls divine,
Dangerous to a soul like mine!
Many bloom in Lesbos' isle;
Many in Ionia smile;
Rhodes a pretty swarm can boast;
Caria too contains a host.
Sum these all-of brown and fair
You may count two thousand there!
What, you gaze! I pray you, peace!
More I'll find before I cease.
Have I told you all my flames,
'Mong the amorous Syrian dames?
Have I number'd every one,
Glowing under Egypt's sun?
Or the nymphs, who blushing sweet
Deck the shrine of Love in Crete;
Where the God, with festal play,
Holds eternal holiday?
Still in clusters, still remain
Gade's warm, desiring train;
Still there lies a myriad more
On the sable India's shore;
These, and many far remov'd,

All are loving-all are lov'd!

Anacreon

Give Me The Harp Of Epic Song

Give me the harp of epic song,
Which Homer's finger thrill'd along;
But tear away the sanguine string,
For war is not the theme I sing.
Proclaim the laws of festal rite,
I'm monarch of the board tonight;
And all around shall brim as high,
And quaff the tide as deep as I!
And when the cluster's mellowing dews
Their warm, enchanting balm infuse,
Our feet shall catch th' elastic bound,
And reel us through the dance's round.
Oh Bacchus! we shall sing to thee,
In wild but sweet ebriety!
And flash around such sparks of thought,
As Bacchus could alone have taught!
Then give the harp of epic song,
Which Homer's finger thrill'd along;
But tear away the sanguine string,
For war is not the theme I sing!

Anacreon

Gold

Not to love a pain is deem'd,
And to love's the same esteem'd:
But of all the greatest pain
Is to love unlov'd again.
Birth in love is now rejected,
Parts and arts are disrespected,
Only gold is look'd upon.
A curse take him that was won
First to doat upon it; hence
Springs 'twixt brothers difference;
This makes parents slighted; this
War's dire cause and fuel is:
And what's worst, by this alone
Are we lovers overthrown.

Anacreon

Grave Me A Cup With Brilliant Grace

Grave me a cup with brilliant grace,
Deep as the rich and holy vase,
Which on the shrine of Spring reposes,
When shepherds hail that hour of roses.
Grave it with themes of chaste design,
Form'd for a heavenly bowl like mind.
Display not there the barbarous rites,
In which religious zeal delights;
Nor any tale of tragic fate,
Which history trembles to relate!
No-cull thy fancies from above,
Themes of heav'n and themes of love.
Let Bacchus, Jove's ambrosial boy,
Distil the grape in drops of joy,
And while he smiles at every tear,
Let warm-ey'd Venus, dancing near,
With spirits of the genial bed,
The dewy herbage deftly tread.
Let Love be there, without his arms,
In timid nakedness of charms;
And all the Graces, link'd with Love,
Blushing through the shadowy grove;
While rosy boys disporting round,
In circlets trip the velvet ground;
But ah! if there Apollo toys,
I tremble for my rosy boys!

Anacreon

Here Recline You, Gentle Maid

Here recline you, gentle maid,
Sweet is this imbowering shade;
Sweet the young, the modest trees,
Ruffled by the kissing breeze;
Sweet the little founts that weep,
Lulling bland the mind to sleep;
Hark! they whisper as they roll,
Calm persuasion to the soul;
Tell me, tell me, is not this
All a stilly scene of bliss?
Who, my girl, would pass it by?
Surely neither you nor I!

Anacreon

I Care Not For The Idle State

I care not for the idle state
Of Persia's king, the rich, the great!
I envy not the monarch's throne,
Nor wish the treasur'd gold my own.
But oh! be mine the rosy braid,
The fervour of my brows to shade;
Be mine the odours, richly sighing,
Amidst my hoary tresses flying.
Today I'll haste to quaff my wine,
As if tomorrow ne'er should shine;
But if tomorrow comes, why then-
I'll haste to quaff my wine again.
And thus while all our days are bright,
Nor time has dimm'd their bloomy light,
Let us the festal hours beguile
With mantling cup and cordial smile;
And shed from every bowl of wine
The richest dropp on Bacchus' shrine!
For Death may come with brow unpleasant,
May come, when least we wish him present,
And beckon to the sable shore,
And grimly bid us-drink no more!

Anacreon

I Pray Thee, By The Gods Above

I pray thee, by the gods above,
Give me the mighty bowl I love,
And let me sing, in wild delight,
'I will-I will be mad tonight!'
Alcmæon once, as legends tell,
Was frenzied by the fiends of hell;
Orestes too, with naked tread,
Frantic pac'd the mountain-head;
And why? a murder'd mother's shade
Before their conscious fancy play'd.
But I can ne'er a murderer be,
The grape alone shall bleed by me;
Yet can I rave, in wild delight,
'I will-I will be mad tonight.'
The son of Jove, in days of yore,
Imbru'd his hands in youthful gore,
And brandish'd, with a maniac joy,
The quiver of th' expiring boy:
And Ajax, with tremendous shield,
Infuriate scour'd the guiltless field.
But I, whose hands no quiver hold,
No weapon but this flask of gold;
The trophy of whose frantic hours
Is but a scatter'd wreath of flowers;
Yet, yet can sing with wild delight,
'I will-I will be mad tonight!'

Anacreon

I Will; I Will; The Conflict's Past

I will; I will; the conflict's past,
And I'll consent to love at last.
Cupid has long, with smiling art,
Invited me to yield my heart;
And I have thought that peace of mind
Should not be for a smile resign'd;
And I've repell'd the tender lure,
And hop'd my heart should sleep secure.
But, slighted in his boasted charms,
The angry infant flew to arms;
He slung his quiver's golden frame,
He took his bow, his shafts of flame,
And proudly summon'd me to yield,
Or meet him on the martial field.
And what did I unthinking do?
I took to arms, undaunted too;
Assum'd the corslet, shield, and spear,
And, like Pelides, smil'd at fear.
Then (hear it, all you powers above!)
I fought with Love! I fought with Love!
And now his arrows all were shed-
And I had just in terrors fled-
When, heaving an indignant sigh,
To see me thus unwounded fly,
And, having now no other dart,
He glanc'd himself into my heart!
My heart-alas the luckless day!
Receiv'd the God, and died away.
Farewell, farewell, my faithless shield!
Thy lord at length is forc'd to yield.
Vain, vain, is every outward care,
My foe's within, and triumphs there.

Anacreon

Instructions To A Painter

Best of painters come, pursue
What our Muse invites thee to,
And Lyæus, whose shrill flute
Vies with her harmonious lute;
Draw me a full city, where
Several shapes of mirth appear;
And the laws of love, if cold
Wax so great a flame can hold.

Anacreon

Listen To The Muse's Lyre

Listen to the Muse's lyre,
Master of the pencil's fire!
Sketch'd in painting's bold display,
Many a city first portray,
Many a city, revelling free,
Warm with loose festivity.
Picture then a rosy train,
Bacchants straying o'er the plain;
Piping, as they roam along,
Roundelay or shepherd-song.
Paint me next, if painting may
Such a theme as this portray,
All the happy heaven of love,
These elect of Cupid prove.

Anacreon

Love's Arrows

In the Lemnian forge of late
Vulcan making arrows sate,
Whilst with honey their barb'd points
Venus, Love with gall anoints:
Armed Mars by chance comes there,
Brandishing a sturdy spear,
And in scorn the little shaft
Offering to take up, he laugh'd:
'This,' saith Love, 'which thou dost slight,
Is not (if thou try it) light;
Up Mars takes it, Venus smil'd;
But he (sighing) to the Child,
'Take it,' cries, 'its weight I feel;
'Nay,' says Love, 'e'en keep it still.'

Anacreon

Love's Mark

Horses plainly are descry'd
By the mark upon their side:
Parthians are ditinguished
By the mitres on their head:
But from all men else a lover
I can easily discover,
For upon his easy breast
Love his brand-mark hath imprest.

Anacreon

Love's Night Walk

Downward was the wheeling Bear
Driven by the Waggoner:
Men by powerful sleep opprest,
Gave their busy troubles rest;
Love, in this still depth of night,
Lately at my house did light;
Where, perceiving all fast lock'd,
At the door he boldly knock'd.
'Who's that,' said I, 'That does keep
Such a noise, and breaks my sleep?'
'Ope,' saith Love, 'for pity hear;
'Tis a child, thou need'st not fear,
Wet and weary, from his way
Led by this dark night astray.'
With compassion this I heard;
Light I struck, the door unbarr'd;
Where a little boy appears,
Who wings, bow, and quiver bears;
Near the fire I made him stand,
With my own I chaf'd his hand,
And with kindly busy care
Wrung the chill drops from his hair.
When well warm'd he was, and dry,
'Now,' saith he, "'tis time to try
If my bow no hurt did get,
For methinks the string is wet.'
With that, drawing it, a dart
He let fly that pierc'd my heart;
Leaping then, and laughing said,
'Come, my friend, with me be glad;
For my bow thou seest is sound,
Since thy heart hath got a wound.'

Anacreon

Mingle, My Boy, A Little Draught For Me

Mingle, my boy, a little draught for me
In such wise, now, as I shall tell to thee.
First, mark my words, into this goblet run
A little of that old Anacreon.
Now take that slender flagon over there-
'Tis Sapho's own, no better anywhere-
And pour into the glass to give it strength
Just about half your little finger's length.
'There now, my master, surely it will do:'
Nay, boy, not yet; a little Pindar too.
There, there. 'tis full, the glass o'erflows the crown;
Just hand it me and I will drink it down.
Methinks Apollo, should he chance to come
Upon me now, would say, 'Just mix me some
Of that same brew I see you tipping there'.
Or if the Paphian maid should this way fare
With Eros, her companion, wandering free,
They both would cry, 'Ho, Servus, make it three.'

Anacreon

Mirth

I divine Lyæus prize,
Who with mirth and wit supplies:
Compass'd with a jovial quire,
I affect to touch the lyre:
But of all my greatest joy
Is with sprightly maids to toy;
My free heart no envy bears,
Nor another's envy fears;
Proof against invective wrongs,
Brittle shafts of poisonous tongues.
Wine with quarrels sour'd I hate,
Or feasts season'd with debate:
But I love a harmless measure;
Life to quiet hath no pleasure.

Anacreon

Now The Star Of Day Is High

Now the star of day is high,
Fly, my girls, in pity fly,
Bring me wine in brimming urns,
Cool my lip, it burns, it burns!
Sunn'd by the meridian fire,
Panting, languid I expire!
Give me all those humid flowers,
dropp them o'er my brow in showers.
Scarce a breathing chaplet now
Lives upon my feverish brow;
Every dewy rose I wear
Sheds its tears, and withers there.
But for you, my burning mind!
Oh! what shelter shall I find?
Can the bowl, or flowret's dew,
Cool the flame that scorches you?

Anacreon

Observe When Mother Earth Is Dry

Observe when mother earth is dry,
She drinks the droppings of the sky;
And then the dewy cordial gives
To ev'ry thirsty plant that lives.
The vapours, which at evening weep,
Are beverage to the swelling deep;
And when the rosy sun appears,
He drinks the ocean's misty tears.
The moon too quaffs her paly stream
Of lustre, from the solar beam.
Then, hence with all your sober thinking!
Since Nature's holy law is drinking;
I'll make the laws of nature mine,
And pledge the universe in wine!

Anacreon

On A Basin Wherein Venus Was Engraved

What bold hand the sea engraves,
Whilst its undetermin'd waves
In a dish's narrow round
Art's more powerful rage doth bound?
See, by some Promethean mind
Cytherea there design'd,
Mother of the deities,
Expos'd naked to our eyes
In all parts, save those alone
Modesty will not have shown,
Which for covering only have
The thin mantle of a wave:
On the surface of the main,
Which a smiling calm lays plain,
She, like frothy sedges, swims,
And displays her snowy limbs:
Whilst the foaming billow swells,
As her breast its force repels,
And her form striving to hide
Her doth by her neck divide,
Like a lily round beset
by the purple violet.
Loves, who dolphins do bestride,
O'er the silver surges ride,
And with many a wanton smile
Lovers of their hearts beguile;
Whilst the people of the flood
To her side, like wantons, scud.

Anacreon

On Himself

On this verdant lotus laid,
Underneath the myrtle's shade,
Let us drink our sorrows dead,
Whilst Love plays the Ganimed.
Life like to a wheel runs round,
And ere long, we underground
(Ta'en by death asunder) must
Moulder in forgotten dust.
Why then graves should we bedew?
Why the ground with odours strew?
Better whilst alive, prepare
Flowers and unguents for our hair.
Come, my fair one! come away;
All our cares behind us lay,
That these pleasures we may know,
Ere we come to those below.

Anacreon

One Day, The Muses Twin'D The Hands

One day, the Muses twin'd the hands
Of baby Love, with flow'ry bands;
And to celestial Beauty gave
The captive infant as her slave.
His mother comes with many a toy,
To ransom her beloved boy;
His mother sues, but all in vain!
He ne'er will leave his chains again.
Nay, should they take his chains away,
The little captive still would stay.
'If this,' he cries, 'a bondage be,
Who could wish for liberty?'

Anacreon

Praise Of Bacchus

Whilst our joys with wine we raise,
Youthful Bacchus we will praise.
Bacchus dancing did invent;
Bacchus is on songs intent;
Bacchus teacheth Love to court,
And his mother how to sport;
Graceful confidence he lends;
He oppressive trouble ends;
To the bowl when we repair,
Grief doth vanish into air;
Drink we then, and drown all sorrow;
All our cares not knows the morrow;
Life is dark, let's dance and play,
They that will be troubled may;
We our joys with wine will raise,
Youthful Bacchus we will praise.

Anacreon

Runaway Gold

When with soft and viewless feet
Like the wind, and no less fleet,
Flies me, as he flies away,
Gold, that arrant Runaway,
I pursue not: who is fain
To hunt a home a hateful bane?
Free from Runaway Gold, my breast
Is of sorrow dispossesst;
I, to all the winds that blow,
All my cares abroad may throw:
I may take my lyre and raise
Jocund songs in Cupid's praise.
When my wary sprite disdains
To be trapped by Runaway's trains,
Suddenly he hies unto me
And with trouble would undo me;
Hoping that himself I'll take
And my darling lyre forsake.
Faithless Gold, thy labour's naught;
By thy snares I'll not be caught.
More delight than Gold doth bring
I can gain from my lute-string.
Thou men's hearts didst sow with guile,
And with envy them defile;
But the lyre. . . .

Anacreon

Spring

Pleasant 'tis abroad to stray
Thro' the meadow deep in hay,
Where soft zephyrs, breathing low,
Odorous sweets around us throw:
Pleasant, where the gadding vine
Weaves a safe shade, to recline
With some dainty girl whose breast
Cypris wholly hath possest.

Anacreon

Tell Me How To Punish Thee

Tell me how to punish thee,
For the mischief done to me?
Silly swallow! prating thing,
Shall I clip that wheeling wing?
Or, as Tereus did of old
(So the fabled tale is told),
Tongue that utter'd such a lay?
How unthinking hast thou been!
Long before the dawn was seen,
When I slumber'd in a dream,
(Love was the delicious theme!)
Just when I was nearly blest,
Ah! thy matin broke my rest!

Anacreon

Tell Me, Gentle Youth, I Pray Thee

'Tell me, gentle youth, I pray thee,
What in purchase shall I pay thee
For this little waxen toy,
Image of the Paphian boy?'
Thus I said the other day,
To a youth who pass'd my way:
'Sir,' (he answer'd, and the while
Answer'd all in Doric style,)
'Take it, for a trifle take it;
Think not yet that I could make it;
Pray, believe it was not I;
No-it cost me many a sigh,
And I can no longer keep
Little gods, who murder sleep!'
'Here, then, here,' (I said with joy,)
'Here is silver for the boy:
He shall be my bosom guest,
Idol of my pious breast!'
Little Love! thou now art mine,
Warm me with that torch of thine;
Make me feel as I have felt,
Or thy waxen frame shall melt.
I must burn in warm desire,
Or thou, my boy, in yonder fire.

Anacreon

Tell Me, Why, My Sweetest Dove

Tell me, why, my sweetest dove,
Thus your humid pinions move,
Shedding through the air in showers
Essence of the balmiest flowers?
Tell me whither, whence you rove,
Tell me all, my sweetest dove.
Curious stranger! I belong
To the bard of Teian song;
With his mandate now I fly
To the nymph of azure eye;
Ah! that eye has madden'd many,
But the poet more than any!
Venus, for a hymn of love,
Warbled in her votive grove,
(’T was in sooth a gentle lay,)
Gave me to the bard away.
See me now his faithful minion,
Thus with softly-gliding pinion,
To his lovely girl I bear
Songs of passion through the air.
Oft he blandly whispers me,
'Soon, my bird, I'll set you free.'
But in vain he'll bid me fly,
I shall serve him till I die.
Never could my plumes sustain
Ruffling winds and chilling rain,
O'er the plains, or in the dell,
On the mountain's savage swell;
Seeking in the desert wood
Gloomy shelter, rustic food.
Now I lead a life of ease,
Far from such retreats as these;
From Anacreon's hand I eat
Food delicious, viands sweet;
Flutter o'er his goblet's brim,
Sip the foamy wine with him.
Then I dance and wanton round
To the lyre's beguiling sound;
Or with gently-fanning wings

Shade the minstrel while he sings:
On his harp then sink in slumbers,
Dreaming still of dulcet numbers!
This is all-away-away
You have made me waste the day.
How I've chatter'd! prating crow
Never yet did chatter so.

Anacreon

The Accompt

If thou dost the number know
Of the leaves on every bough,
If thou can'st the reckoning keep
Of the sands within the deep;
Thee of all men will I take,
And my Love's accomptant make.
Of Athenians first a score
Set me down; then fifteen more;
Add a regiment to these
Of Corinthian mistresses,
For the most renown'd for fair
In Achæa sojourn there;
Next our Lesbian Beauties tell;
Those that in Ionia dwell;
Those of Rhodes and Caria count;
To two thousand they amount.
Wonder'st thou I love so many?
'Las of Syria we not any,
Egypt yet, nor Crete have told,
Where his orgies Love doth hold.
What to those then wilt thou say
Which in eastern Bactria,
Or the western Gades remain?
But give o'er, thou toil'st in vain;
For the sum which thou dost seek
Puzzles all arithmetic.

Anacreon

The Bee

Love, a Bee that lurk'd among
Roses saw not, and was stung:
Who for his hurt finger crying,
Running sometimes, sometimes flying,
Doth to his fair mother hie,
And O help, cries he, I die;
A wing'd snake hath bitten me,
Call'd by countrymen a Bee:
At which Venus, if such smart
A Bee's little sting impart,
How much greater is the pain,
They, whom thou hast hurt, sustain?

Anacreon

The Bowl Of Song

Sweet the song Anacreon sings,
Sweet notes flow from Sappho's strings:
Pindar's strains, their sweets among,
Add, to crown the bowl of song.
Such a triple charm would sure
Dionysus' lips allure;
Paphos' sleek-skinn'd queen would deign,
Or Love's self, the cup to drain.

Anacreon

The Dream

In a dream unto me came
Anacreon, of Teian fame.
He accosted me, and I
Ran up to him lovingly,
And my arms about him threw.
Old he was, but fair to view,
Fair, a lover of the vine;
His stain'd lip yet breath'd of wine.
Falteringly he seem'd to tread;
(Love his trembling footsteps led;)
Crowned was his brow, and he
Held the garland out to me,
Of Anacreon it breath'd:
Straight my forehead (fool!) I wreath'd;
And from that time till today
I by love am plagued alway.

Anacreon

The Grasshopper

Grasshopper thrice-happy! who
Sipping the cool morning dew,
Queen-like chirpest all the day
Seated on some verdant spray;
Thine is all whate'er earth springs,
Or the hours with laden wings;
Thee, the ploughman calls his joy,
'Cause thou nothing dost destroy:
Thou by all art honour'd; all
Thee the spring's sweet prophet call;
By the Muses thou'rt admir'd,
By Apollo art inspir'd
Ageless, ever-singing, good,
Without passion, flesh or blood;
Oh how near thy happy state
Comes the gods to imitate!

Anacreon

The Lute

Of th' Atrides I would sing,
Or the wand'ring Theban king;
But when I my lute did prove,
Nothing it would sound but love;
I new strung it, and to play
Herc'les' labours did essay;
But my pains I fruitless found;
Nothing it but love would sound:
Heroes then farewell, my lute
To all strains but love is mute.

Anacreon

The Old Lover

Though my aged head be grey,
And thy youth more fresh than May,
Fly me not; oh! rather see
In this wreath how gracefully
Roses with pale lilies join:
Learn of them, so let us twine.

Anacreon

The Phrygian Rock, That Braves The Storm

The Phrygian rock, that braves the storm,
Was once a weeping matron's form;
And Progne, hapless, frantic maid,
Is now a swallow in the shade.
Oh! that a mirror's form were mine,
To sparkle with that smile divine;
And like my heart I then should be,
Reflecting thee, and only thee!
Or were I, love, the robe which flows
O'er every charm that secret glows,
In many a lucid fold to swim,
And cling and grow to every limb!
Oh! could I, as the streamlet's wave,
Thy warmly-mellowing beauties lave,
Or float as perfume on thine hair,
And breathe my soul in fragrance there!
I wish I were the zone, that lies
Warm to thy breast, and feels its sighs!
Or like those envious pearl's that show
So faintly round that neck of snow,
Yes, I would be a happy gem,
Like them to hang, to fade like them.
What more would thy Anacreon be?
Oh! any thing that touches thee.
Nay, sandals for those airy feet
Thus to be press'd by thee were sweet!

Anacreon

The Rose

With the flowery crowned spring
Now the vernal rose we sing;
Sons of mirth, your sprightly lays
Mix with ours, to sound its praise:
Rose, the gods' and men's sweet flower;
Rose, the Graces' paramour:
This of Muses the delight,
This is Venus' favourite;
Sweet, when guarded by sharp thorns;
Sweet, when it soft hands adorns;
How at mirthful boards admir'd!
How at Bacchus' feasts desir'd!
Fair without it what is born?
Rosy-finger'd is the Morn;
Rosy-arm'd the nymphs we name;
Rosy-cheek'd Love's queen proclaim:
This relief 'gainst sickness lends;
This the very dead befriends;
This Time's malice doth prevent,
Old retains its youthful scent.
When Cythera from the main,
Pallas sprung from Jove's crack'd brain,
Then the rose receiv'd its birth
From the youthful teeming earth;
Every god was its protector,
Wat'ring it by turns with nectar,
Till from thorns it grew, and prov'd
Of Lyæus the belov'd.

Anacreon

The Swallow

Gentle swallow, thou we know
Every year dost come and go;
In the spring thy nest thou mak'st;
In the winter it forsak'st,
And divert'st thyself awhile
Near the Memphian towers, or Nile:
But Love in my suffering breast
Builds, and never quits his nest;
First one Love's hatch'd; when that flies,
In the shell another lies;
Then a third is half expos'd;
Then a whole brood is disclos'd,
Which for meat still peeping cry,
Whilst the others that can fly
Do their callow brethren feed,
And grown up, they young ones breed.
What then will become of me
Bound to pain incessantly,
Whilst so many Loves conspire
Of my heart by turns to tire?

Anacreon

The Vain Advice

Prythee trouble me no more;
I will drink, be mad, and roar:
Alcmæon and Orestes grew
Mad, when they their mothers slew:
But I no man having kill'd
Am with hurtless fury fill'd.
Hercules with madness struck,
Bent his bow, his quiver shook;
Ajax mad, did fiercely wield
Hector's sword, and grasp'd his shield:
I nor spear nor target have,
But this cup (my weapon) wave:
Crown'd with roses, thus for more
Wine I call, drink, dance, and roar.

Anacreon

The Vintage

Men and maids at time of year
The ripe clusters jointly bear
To the press, but in when thrown,
They by men are trod alone,
Who in Bacchus' praises join,
Squeeze the grape, let out the wine:
Oh with what delight they spy
The new must when tunned work high!
Which if old men freely take,
Their grey heads and heels they shake;
And a young man, if he find
Some fair maid to sleep resign'd
In the shade, he straight goes to her,
Wakes, and roundly 'gins to woo her,
Whilst Love slily stealing in
Tempts her to the pleasing sin:
Yet she long resists his offers,
Nor will hear whate'er he proffers,
Till perceiving that his prayer
Melts into regardless air,
Her, who seemingly refrains,
He by pleasing force constrains;
Wine doth boldness thus dispense,
Teaching young men insolence.

Anacreon

The Women Tell Me Every Day

The women tell me every day
That all my bloom has past away.
'Behold,' the pretty wantons cry,
'Behold this mirror with a sigh;
The locks upon thy brow are few,
And, like the rest, they're withering too!'
Whether decline has thinn'd my hair,
I'm sure I neither know nor care;
But this I know, and this I feel,
As onward to the tomb I steal,
That still as death approaches nearer,
The joys of life are sweeter, dearer;
And had I but an hour to live,
That little hour to bliss I'd give!

Anacreon

They Tell How Atys, Wild With Love

They tell how Atys, wild with love,
Roams the mount and haunted grove;
Cybele's name he howls around,
The gloomy blast returns the sound!
Oft too by Claros' hallow'd spring,
The votaries of the laurell'd king
Quaff the inspiring, magic stream,
And rave in wild, prophetic dream.
But frenzied dreams are not for me,
Great Bacchus is my deity!
Full of mirth, and full of him,
While waves of perfume round me swim;
While flavour'd bowls are full supplied,
And you sit blushing by my side,
I will be mad and raving too
Mad, my girl! with love for you!

Anacreon

Thou, Whose Soft And Rosy Hues

Thou, whose soft and rosy hues
Mimic form and soul infuse;
Best of painters! come portray
The lovely maid that's far away.
Far away, my soul! thou art,
But I've thy beauties all by heart.
Paint her jetty ringlets straying,
Silky twine in tendrils playing;
And, if painting hath the skill
To make the spicy balm distil,
Let every little lock exhale
A sigh of perfume on the gale.
Where her tresses' curly flow
Darkles o'er the brow of snow,
Let her forehead beam to light,
Burnish'd as the ivory bright.
Let her eyebrows sweetly rise
In jetty arches o'er her eyes,
Gently in a crescent gliding,
Just commingling, just dividing.
But hast thou any sparkles warm,
The lightning of her eyes to form?
Let them effuse the azure ray
With which Minerva's glances play,
And give them all that liquid fire
That Venus' languid eyes respire.
O'er her nose and cheek be shed
Flushing white and mellow'd red;
Gradual tints, as when there glows
In snowy milk the bashful rose.
Then her lip, so rich in blisses!
Sweet petitioner for kisses!
Pouting nest of bland persuasion,
Ripely suing Love's invasion.
Then beneath the velvet chin,
Whose dimple shades a love within,
Mould her neck with grace descending,
In a heaven of beauty ending;
While airy charms, above, below,

Sport and flutter on its snow.
Now let a floating, lucid veil,
Shadow her limbs, but not conceal;
A charm may peep, a hue may beam,
And leave the rest to Fancy's dream.
Enough-'t is she! 't is all I seek;
It glows, it lives, it soon will speak!

Anacreon

Three Songs

i

The women tell me, 'Man, you're old;
don't be so bold.
Look into a mirror
to make it clearer:
your hair
ain't there.'

But I can't see what lies
above my eyes.
I do see more reason to play the game,
when Death takes aim.

ii

If wealth with all its money
could make us never die,
I'd give my life to earning,
and then, when Death came by,

I'd pay him and forget him.
But there's no way to spend
yourself into forever.
So since my life must end,

what good does money do me,
or why then should I mourn
the certainty of dying,
which comes with being born?

My riches are in friendship
and drinking wine at ease,
and moon-lit celebrations
of Love's solemnities.

iii

Old Gyges had a ton of gold

when he was Asia's king;
his treasure houses leave me cold,
I don't grudge him a thing.

What counts with me is scented hair,
rose garlands, and today;
so let's drink while the weather's fair:
tomorrow's far away.

- translated from the Greek by Jon Corelis

Anacreon

Upon Cupid

As lately I a garland bound,
'Mongst roses I there Cupid found;
I took him, put him in my cup,
And drunk with wine, I drank him up.
Hence then it is that my poor breast
Could never since find any rest.

Anacreon

Vulcan! Hear Your Glorious Task

Vulcan! hear your glorious task;
I do not from your labours ask
In gorgeous panoply to shine,
For war was ne'er a sport of mine.
No-let me have a silver bowl,
Where I may cradle all my soul;
But let not o'er its simple frame
Your mimic constellations flame;
Nor grave upon the swelling side,
Orion, scowling o'er the tide.
I care not for the glitt'ring wane,
Nor yet the weeping sister train.
But oh! let vines luxuriant roll
Their blushing tendrils round the bowl.
While many a rose-lip'd bacchant maid
Is culling clusters in their shade.
Let sylvan gods, in antic shapes,
Wildly press the gushing grapes;
And flights of love, in wanton ringlets,
Flit around on golden winglets;
While Venus, to her mystic bower,
Beckons the rosy vintage-Power.

Anacreon

Wine And Song

Bring me hither Homer's lute,
Taught with mirth (not wars) to suit;
Reach a full cup, that I may
All the laws of wine obey,
Drink, and dance, and to the lyre
Sing what Bacchus shall inspire.

Anacreon

Wine The Healer

Who his cups can stoutly bear,
In his cups despiseth fear,
In his cups can nimbly dance,
Him Lyæus will advance:
Nectar of us mortals wine,
The glad offspring of the vine,
Screen'd with leaves, preserv'd within
The plump grape's transparent skin,
In the body all diseases,
In the soul all grief appeases.

Anacreon

Youth And Age

When I see the young men play,
Young methinks I am as they;
And my aged thoughts laid by,
To the dance with joy I fly:
Come, a flowery chaplet lend me;
Youth and mirthful thoughts attend me:
Age be gone, we'll dance among
Those that young are, and be young:
Bring some wine, boy, fill about;
You shall see the old man's stout;
Who can laugh and tipple too,
And be mad as well as you.

Anacreon

Youthful Eld

Young men dancing, and the old
Sporting I with joy behold;
But an old man gay and free
Dancing most I love to see;
Age and youth alike he shares,
For his heart belies his hairs.

Anacreon