



# STATES OF GRACE

**Sappho**  
**Catullus**  
**Horace**  
**du Bellay**  
**Baudelaire**  
**St. Mallarmé**  
**Dali ( of sorts )**

—particular charm in speech,  
movement, manners etc.;  
a seemingly godlike gift;  
divine favor or dispensation;  
a prayer of thanksgiving—

adaptations by Reginald Hyatte

**Sappho fragment 31: 'Awesome'**

He would seem  
in my eyes  
as happy  
as the gods,  
a man who  
has the luck  
to sit close  
facing you  
and hear your  
sweet voice and  
charming laugh —  
the very  
thought truly  
causes the heart  
to beat hard  
in my chest.  
For when I  
no more than  
glance in your  
direction,  
I can't speak  
a word, my  
tongue is tied;  
all at once  
hot pin-pricks  
course under  
my skin, sight  
fails me, both  
my ears buzz,  
cold sweat streams;  
trembling from  
awe wholly  
overcomes  
me; paler  
than dry grass,  
I seem near  
death.

**‘Elevation’ — Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil***

Above the ponds, over the valleys,  
the mountains, forests, clouds, seas, up beyond  
the Sun, past the upper reaches of space,  
outside the confines of the star-studded spheres,

my mind, you move nimbly, and as if  
swimming ecstatic in the ocean,  
gaily you plow the profound immensity  
with an ineffable male delight.

Fly up high, far from these sick’ning miasmas,  
go cleanse yourself in the upper atmosphere,  
and drink the purest divine liqueur,  
the bright fire that fills limpid outer space.

Leaving below ENNUI and SPLEEN that weigh  
down our foggy existence, fortunate  
is he who can with his vigorous wing rush  
yearning toward those serene fields of light,

whose larklike thoughts take flight, fancy-free,  
toward the heavens at dawn — who soars  
over life and comprehends effortlessly  
the language of flowers and wordless things.

## **Catullus 2: *'Peace of Mind'***

O sparrow, toy, my girl's delight,  
she holds you tight against her breast  
and makes you peck her fingertip,  
provoking you to bite down hard.  
Since teasing such a darling thing  
as you delights my lady-love  
(I think she finds some comfort there  
that makes her flame of love die down),  
oh, would that I could tease you, too,  
and ease my melancholic mind!

***‘Praise the day!’ — Horace’s Ode 1.9***

You see afar how snow-bound Mount Soracte  
now stands out white against the sky; the forests  
    bend below the blowing cold, and rivers  
    groan beneath the floes that choke their channels.

Drive out the cold, and stack some seasoned cedar  
upon the hearth, and pour your guests that Sabine  
    wine, now four years old, o party-master,  
    flowing freely from its two-eared pitcher.

The gods will do the rest, for once they silence  
the strident winds that brawl with roaring Neptune,  
    then the mountain ash and slender cypress  
    need no longer fear their roots be shaken.

Don’t seek to learn what Fate will bring tomorrow,  
but count as gain these moments Fortune gives you:  
    while you’re young, enjoy the many pleasures  
    love and dancing offer — what advantage

does dull old age enjoy, I ask you, youthful  
companion? Show your strength at sports arenas,  
    saunter in the public squares and whisper  
    gentle words of love inspired by moonlight.

Seek out in secret corners charming laughter:  
you’ll find a girl alone among the shadows.  
    Take her finger-ring, a lover’s token.  
    Maidenly, she yields without resistance.

**‘Synaesthesia’** — excerpt from **Charles Baudelaire’s ‘The Man-God,’**  
**Artificial Paradises**

[...] Let us follow the procession of the human imagination all the way to its last and most resplendent resting-place, to the individual’s belief in his own divinity.

Should you happen to be one of these souls, your innate love of form and color will find at the very beginning a source of nourishment in the first stages of your intoxication. Colors will take on unaccustomed force and will enter your brain with a triumphant intensity. Refined, mediocre, or even bad ceiling paintings will take on a startling life: the coarsest paper covering the walls of some inn will stand out in three dimensions like splendid dioramas. Nymphs, their flesh tones vivid, gaze on you with large eyes more deep and limpid than the sky and water; antique personages, dressed in their sacerdotal or military costumes, exchange grave confidences with you through a simple gaze. The sinuosity of lines is a definitively clear language in which you read the soul’s agitation and desire. At the same time, a mysterious and temporary state of mind develops where the profundity of life, bristling with its many problems, reveals itself entirely in the spectacle, albeit so very natural and trivial, before your eyes — where the first object that presents itself becomes a speaking symbol. Fourier’s *analogies* and Swedenborg’s *correspondences* are incarnated in the vegetal and animal matter that comes under your gaze, and instead of teaching through their voice, they indoctrinate you through form and color. The ability to understand allegory takes on in you proportions unknown to yourself; we will note in passing that allegory, this most *spiritual* genre which clumsy painters have accustomed us to disdain but which is truly one of the primary and most natural forms of poetry, regains its legitimate domination in the intellect illuminated by this intoxication. [...] Grammar, arid grammar itself becomes something like an evocatory sorcery; words come to life in flesh and bones, the noun in its substantial majesty, the adjective, a transparent garment covering and coloring it like a glaze, and the verb, an angel of movement giving an impetus to the sentence. Music, another language dear to the lazy or to profound minds seeking relaxation in the variety that work offers, speaks to you about yourself and recounts to you the poem of your life: it incorporates itself in you, and you merge into it. It speaks your passion, not in the vague and indefinite way it does during your carefree evenings at the opera, but in a detailed, positive manner, each rhythmic movement marking a movement familiar to your soul, each note transforming itself into a word, and the entire poem entering into your brain like a dictionary endowed with life.

*‘A dream of country retirement’* — adapted from **Horace’s Epode 2**

Happy he who far from the mad business world,  
just like the men in ancient times,  
tills the ancestral fields with his twin-yoked oxen  
free from cares of money-making!  
No soldier, he does not wake to the bugle call  
nor dreads to ride the raging seas;  
he avoids the courts of law and haughty portals  
of influential citizens.  
And, so, our man occupies himself with training  
the young vine to the tall poplar;  
or in a sequestered valley he watches over  
his wandering herd of cattle;  
and having trimmed rotten branches with his pruning-knife,  
he then grafts on more fruitful ones;  
or once he’s squeezed honey from the comb, he puts it  
into jars, and he shears the sheep;  
or when in the fields fertile Autumn rears his head  
crowned with a wreath of mature apples,  
how happy our man is to pluck off the grafted pears  
and the grapes of royal purple,  
which he offers you, Priapus and Silvanus,  
who guard his land and boundaries!  
It’s pleasant to lie under the holm oak sometimes  
or, at others, on the thick grass.  
While he lies there, the stream flows along the high banks,  
the birds warble in the forests,  
and the springs with their running waters strike the ear,  
sweet sounds that lull our man to sleep.  
But when thunderer Jupiter’s hibernal blasts  
bring storms of snow and frozen rain,  
then he drives the sharp-tusked boar from this side and that  
with many hounds into the net  
or spreads with a thin pole the wide-meshed fowler’s net  
to trick the gluttonous thrushes,  
and he traps the timid hare or crane in a snare —  
such pleasant rewards he receives!

Who would not forget the heartaches that love brings on  
when he's in the midst of all this?  
But if a modest wife does her share in tending  
to the housework and the children,  
like a Sabine woman or the hard-working mate  
of a sun-burnt Apulian,  
and heaps up well-seasoned logs on the sacred fire  
at her tired husband's return home  
and shuts the fat she-goats in the wickerwork fold  
where she milks their swollen udders  
and, then, bringing out a jug of this year's sweet wine,  
fixes a meal that costs him nothing,  
how thankful he is to look up from his plate and  
see his hastening, fold-bound sheep,  
the sluggish oxen dragging home the upturned plow  
attached to their bent, weary necks  
and a swarm of home-born slaves under his blest roof  
who gather round the glowing hearth!



***'Nature calls!'* — Stéphane Mallarmé, Poésies**

Bored to my bones, alas! and I've read all the books.  
Take flight! flee! I sense that somewhere afar birds soar  
giddy between uncharted foam and topless skies!  
Nothing — not her eyes that mirror our loved gardens,  
not either, o nights! the sterile glare of my lamp  
on the blank page's forbidding virgin whiteness,  
and not the young wife and babe at her breast — nothing  
will hold back this heart that steeps itself in the sea.  
No, I'll be off! Steamer, your mastheads wavering,  
weigh anchor: far from here exotic nature calls!

Vexed by cruel hopes, my boredom still puts trust in  
the decisive farewell of waving handkerchiefs!  
But, then, what if the masts, apt to invite tempests,  
should chance to be those a wind tilts towards shipwrecks,  
lost and mastless, mastless, no fertile little isles...?  
And yet, my swelling heart, hear the sailors' shanty!

**Catullus 50: ‘*A poem born of sleeplessness*’** — put into prose

Yesterday, Calvus, we spent much of the leisurely evening composing light-hearted poems, as we had agreed, on my wax tablets. We enjoyed ourselves writing down little verses, first in one meter, then in another, each of us taking up in turn his partner’s theme while we joked and drank wine. But later, having returned home all worked up, Calvus, by your charm and wit, I, your poor friend, couldn’t find either food to my liking nor peaceful sleep to close my eyes, I couldn’t overcome my excitement: I tossed and turned and tossed again in bed longing for daybreak so I could speak with you present, heart to heart. Yet finally, while my limbs, exhausted from the effort, lay half-dead on the couch, I composed this poem for you, dear friend, from which you may perceive my distress. Now I entreat you: take care not to be arrogant, take care not to disdain my prayer, dear heart, so that Nemesis the Avenger not demand retribution for your offense. She is a formidable goddess. Take care you not displease her.

***'The IDEA' — Joachim du Bellay, Olive (1550)***

If our lifetime lasts no more than a day  
in eternity; if each new dawn drives  
back our yesterdays never to return;  
if everything born perishes, then  
what sets you dreaming, my imprisoned soul?  
Why delight in the darkness of our day,  
you who have on your back Plato's plumed wing  
to fly heavenward? Up there lies the good  
for which each spirit yearns, there, the repose  
all desire, there is love, there, pleasure, too.  
O my soul, guided to the highest heaven,  
there you will see again the IDEA,  
source of the beauty I love in this world.

***‘Dali-esque Annunciation’***

behold! His unfolding wings  
and the gold gleam of His eye  
o most favored Leda  
gas-blue aura I announce  
the embrace of the Swan

## Sources

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