



WORLD LITERATURE READING 9

Roman Poetry

About the Selection

After Caesar was murdered, a civil war erupted in the Roman Empire. The Roman poet Horace fought against Octavian in that war. Octavian won and became emperor. Octavian eventually took the title Augustus, which means "the majestic one." Horace wrote the following poem in the early years of Octavian's rule. During this time, a new professional army conquered huge territories and brought them under Roman control.

Guided Reading

As you read this poem, pay attention to what Horace thinks of soldiers and how he talks about women. Then answer the questions that follow.



Reader's Dictionary

ennobles: raises in rank or status

lances: long spears

lair: hiding places

ode: a song-like poem

virtue: acting morally

vulgar: in bad taste

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Odes, III, 2, by Horace

Let young men learn how suffering
Ennobles, let them be patient soldiers, severely
Tested, and then be horsemen feared for their
Lances, pursuing fierce Parthians

To their lairs, in troubled times living their lives
In the open air. Let the wives of warring
Kings, and their grown daughters, watch them
From city walls, and sigh, and say:

"Dear Lord! Keep our royal son
And brother safe from this raging lion,
Keep our awkward prince from this bloody
Hero, who cuts through the center of our army!"

WORLD LITERATURE READING 9 (continued)

Roman Poetry

How good, how noble to die for your country.
Death chases those who run from him,
And catches them, and never spares a coward
Or a womanish boy.

Virtue has no concern with reputation,
Shines for its own sake, neither takes up
Arms nor lays them down
Because the mob tells it to.

Virtue opens Heaven for many who deserve
To live, guides itself by its own light, unknown
Except to the virtuous, soars above this cloudy
Earth on wings the vulgar are forever denied.

From *The Essential Horace: Odes, Epodes, Satires, and Epistles*.
Translated by Burton Raffel. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983.

Analyzing the Reading

Directions: Answer the questions below in the spaces provided.

1. In Horace's view, what kinds of soldiers will likely die in battle?

2. **Critical Thinking** What do you think Horace thought of the military?

3. **Critical Thinking** What do you think Horace believed about women's contributions to Roman society?
