

HORACE
CARMEN 1.37 [THE 'CLEOPATRA ODE']
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Now for a drinking spree, now for a loose-footed
light fantastic, now is the time to pay
our debt to the gods, my friends,
and spread a spectacular banquet.

Before today, to bring out Caecuban wine from
family storerooms was wrong, while the crazy
queen was still scheming with her
sickly eunuchs, her pack of perverts,

to send the Capitol crashing and bury
the empire: wild were her dreams of doing
whatever she wished, the best
luck was her liquor. She sobered up

when her ships caught fire, scarcely one unscathed,
and delusions of mind nursed on Egypt's wine
were cured by Caesar with the facts
of fear, his navy close as she fled

from Italy, like a hawk going after
a gentle dove, or a swift hunter tracking
a hare over snow-covered fields
in Thessaly: chains awaited this

damnable monster. But a heroine's death
was her goal: she showed no female shivers
at the sight of a sword, and her
fast-sailing fleet sought no secret harbors.

Her courage was great: she looked on her fallen
palace, a smile still on her face, and boldly
played with venomous serpents,
her flesh drinking their bitter poison,

so highly she dared, her mind set on her death.
Not for her the enemy ship, the crownless
voyage, her role in the grand
parade of Triumph: she was no weak-kneed woman.