

## Empire State

*Qui gurges aut quae flumina lugubris ignara belli*

Horace

Given more time and a sinecure from friends  
in high places, replete with subsistence farm  
not far from Rome (yet far enough) and slaves  
to keep it up and a live stream fed  
year round by a sacred spring (is there another  
kind?), even I might yet turn out  
a book or two of odes and epodes extolling  
with intricate syntax and virtuoso metrics  
such virtues as are to be found in the commonplace,  
gently chiding my urbane friends for vices  
they ought to know better than to indulge yet biting  
my tongue when it gets too sharp, keeping in mind  
how we're all prone to folly, especially when  
we're young and still in the throes of passion, mad  
for the arms of both Venus and Mars, easily led  
down dead-end paths by smooth-cheeked lovers and smoothtalking  
snakes who have no good in mind.

But things being as they are, I don't have to worry  
about that. Friends in high places  
are about as likely as Santa Claus.  
So be it. I've got this piece of desert  
more or less paid for, some peace of mind  
sometimes, a friend or two and a faithful lover  
to share the quiet with, the virtues of working  
the soil with my own hands, watering it  
with water brought up through pumps and pipes  
when (as usual) it doesn't rain,  
the pleasures of watching stems and branches grow  
under my care, flowers open, fruit  
ripen and words come as naturally as these,  
unforced, in uninverted order, no  
hothouse specimens twisted out of their habit  
but sweet and delicious, food fit for the gods,  
put to the tes not by argument  
but fate and fortune, gifts of providence  
in what little time we have to ourselves,  
free as anyone stuck with making a living  
to rail against the fools and privateers  
who would sell their mothers for a quick buck,

lead our country into endless war,  
trade freedom for a little security.

From *Mr America Drives His Car* © Michael Gregory 2013, published by Post-Soviet Depression Press (<http://www.postsovietdepression.com>).