

## Sexual Asymmetry: Roman Ideals and Lyric Inevitability in Horace's *C.* 3.11-16

In this paper, I investigate the relationship between Horace's *C.* 3.11 and 3.16. Scholars have noted that, in contrast to the politically and morally oriented Roman Odes, *C.* 3.7-15 focus on smaller themes. I propose that 3.11 and 16 have an especially strong relationship, as indicated by their shared references to the house of Danaus. They demarcate a group of six poems that includes *C.* 3.11 through 3.16. Porter 1987 argues strongly that *C.* 3.11 is at the center of a series extending from 3.7 to 3.16; our two readings can readily coexist. I believe that Horace uses the smaller series of 3.11 to 3.16 to explore the difficulty of reconciling images of romantic or erotic love—such as we see in lyric and elegy—with Roman cultural expectations of good morals and specifically of marital fidelity.

As a result, the group comprised of *C.* 3.11-16 displays juxtapositions that are often jarring when the poems are read in sequence. The poet of *C.* 3.11 wishes to seduce Lyde, whom he tropes as Anacreon's unbroken foal, ready for sexual taming. (Ancona 1994 treats Horace's use of natural cycles to urge young women's acceptance of sexual maturity.) Horace's proposed tool for persuasion in 3.11 is the story of Hypermestra, the sole Danaid to spare her husband. Hypermestra's loyalty, of course, highlights the perversity of her father's demand that his daughters murder their husbands. This inset myth, which disrupts normative filial and marital relationships, is an odd choice of *exempla* for a seduction. The Danaid story is mirrored by Danaë in *C.* 3.16, where we find a brief recollection that stresses how absurd it is—in the realm of myth—to try to prevent a pregnancy. This father, the progenitor Danaus, is implicitly cast in negative terms for having attempted to derail natural processes of conception and succession.

Within this frame of ruptured family relationships, Horace presents a range of possibilities for how erotic relationships might play out. We expect the Neobule of *C.* 3.12 to be sexually tamed by the end of her ode, in keeping with the Anacreontic motif of 3.11; yet by the end of her ode, Neobule and her beloved Hebrus have apparently not interacted at all. The process of sexual maturation is disrupted in 3.13 as well, though in a more subtle way: the kid will die before reaching adulthood. In 3.14, the idealistic options are faithful marriage and a spotless pre-marital stage—for Livia and Augustus, at any rate, while the poet looks forward to a liaison with a beautiful courtesan. *C.* 3.15 then disrupts the optimistic pronouncements of 3.14 by telling us that women are whorish, that old age is foul, and that loyal marriage is impossible. 3.16, after the brief allusion to Danaë, moves us out of erotic themes and on into larger ethical concerns.

Thanks to the prominence of the Roman Odes at the beginning of Book 3, one can notice how greatly the subsequent erotic odes differ from them in tone. Only *C.* 3.14 shares much with the Roman Odes. But where the Roman Odes critique failures in fidelity (3.3, 3.5) and decorum (3.4, 3.6), *C.* 3.14 offers an idealized image of a perfect Roman world. *C.* 3.15, however, violently undermines the fantasy of 3.14.

Horace therefore uses significant juxtapositions of odes to suggest that, in the world of lyric, the idealized Roman system of values cannot be achieved. There are, he suggests, too many competing stories for how humans will live their lives. Myth tells us that fathers can be violent or unreasonable, and that the moral choice is sometimes to disobey one's parent. Sex and procreation are inevitable even if they threaten the family structure. Poetry tells us that deceit is inevitable and that passionate love exists only outside marriage. Looking from the other side of the equation, erotic poetry is flawed as well: there is no mechanism by which a woman can move

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from being a lover to being a wife. In other poems, Horace styles his lyric as utterly Roman; in *C.* 3.11-16, he shows us how entirely anti-Roman it can be.

Ancona, Ronnie. *Time and the Erotic in Horace's Odes*. Durham and London: 1994.  
Porter, David H. *Horace's Poetic Journey: A Reading of Odes 1-3*. Princeton: 1987.