

Poetic Trappings of Imperial Panegyric

Though panegyric may be the poem's most salient quality, particularly when read in the court of Augustus, Horace's stylistic features challenge the notion that *Odes* 1.2 is purely praise poetry. 1.2 is often unfavorably compared to Vergil's first *Georgic*, and Nisbett and Hubbard sound the consensus view that "Horace's appeal to Octavian (in 1.2) is an offence against the Horatian qualities of moderation and rationality" (1970). Miller (2009) explained Horace's employment of Mercury as an affirmation of Nisbett and Hubbard's interpretation. Furthermore, Miller's study focuses on reading across the *Odes* and does not give particular attention to the literary style of Horace within 1.2 itself. This paper asserts that the rhetorical features and savvy employment of Mercury within *Odes* 1.2 insert rationality in the feverish transitions of the 20s, ultimately altering the traditional reading of 1.2 as pure panegyric. The message exemplified by the repetition and inversion employed throughout the ode is that Augustus should espouse Republican ideals and posturing to avoid the fate which befell Caesar, whose name is recalled from beginning to end in *Odes* 1.2.

This paper focuses particularly on Horace's use of repetition. Horace uses repetition to march the reader towards a crescendo that ends the poem where he began it, with Caesar leading (*te duce, Caesar* – though the name references Octavian; n.b. too the poem's beginning, *iam satis*, is a known intertext to Vergil's first *Georgic* contextually highlighting the assassination of Caesar, which is the beginning of Octavian's political rise). The pattern of the ode is to duplicate a term as a transition into repetitive illustrations, the sum of which illustrates the cyclical nature of civil war. Also, within these repetitions, 1.2 exhibits peculiar dualities reminiscent of Mercury, the divine hero of 1.2 and the subject of 1.10, where he is described emphatically as loved by the gods above and below (the final lines of 1.10 are accented by hyperbaton of *superis*

and *imis: aurea turbam, superis deorum /gratus et imis*). After the opening stanza beginning with *iam satis*, which includes the dual images of fire (*rubente dextera*) and ice (*nivis atque grandinis*), Horace duplicates *terrui* (*terrui urbem / terrui gentis*) to transition into two illustrations of flooding. The first illustration is mythical; it references the age of Pyrrha and offers two images that invert the normal positions of sea and land animals (*piscium et summa genus haesit ulmo* and *superiecto pavidae natarunt aequore dammae*). The second illustration is a fable again intertextually referencing Vergil's first *Georgic*. This fable depicts the Tiber and contains two images of waves: first rising (*retortis litore*) and then crashing down (*diiectum*) on two shrines (*monumenta regis / templaque Vestae*). The engagement with Vergil, accentuated by Horace's employment of repetition, emphasizes (by virtue of rhetorical juxtaposition with Vergil's *G.*) a rational and moderate position regarding Octavian post-Actium. The use of repetition and inversion culminates in Horace's climactic election/appellation of Mercury as Rome's expiator. Not only does Horace repeat *sive* four times in the fashion (though altered version) of a kletic hymn, but he inverts the Roman practice of deifying a man by anthropomorphizing a god. Thus, the style and content dovetail with the character of its hero: Mercury/Augustus.

As my analysis will demonstrate, this poem is not "loudly Augustan" (Nisbett and Hubbard, 1970) or "contemptible sycophancy" (West, 1995); it is subtly admonitory with comedic interludes suggestive of the very character of the ode's hero, Mercury. More than praise Augustus, it climactically identifies his behavior as Mercurial and encourages him to display the finer qualities of this god. Commager (1967) also concludes it is cautionary, imploring Octavian to not exact further revenge against his opposition by abstaining from proscriptions; however, his view is too historically narrow. I believe the patterns, language, and

internal logic point to the cyclical nature of civil war and the dire possibility that “a swift wind of vengeance” (1.2.47-8) may as easily befall Octavian as it did Caesar, whose name is never far from the text.

Augustus retired from public office only to accept extravagant honors and privileges three days later. Caesar was killed for sequestering too much power too fast, and Horace repeatedly notes that Augustus has conquered only fellow citizens, betraying an irony in the honors recently conferred, which are typically reserved for foreign conquests - not to mention laden with religious overtones. In the events of January 27 BCE, Augustus began a Principate in the guise of a Republic, and Horace expressed moderation in the guise of panegyric. Both proved Mercurial and enjoyed through the pen of Horace, Mercury as their patron.

Works Cited

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