

Dic mihi, Musa levis: cur tam gravis esse videris? Weighing Poetry in Horace *Odes* 3.30

In this paper I demonstrate how the much-debated *deduxisse* of *Odes* 3.30.14, where Horace claims to have been the first to introduce Greek lyric poetry into Latin literature (*ex humili potens / princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos / deduxisse modos*), has important Callimachean resonances of slender poetic refinement that, contrary to some recent interpretations, actually enhance the monumentality of Horace's poetry when they are understood in their proper Callimachean context. Further, I show that the multivalent *deduxisse* succinctly brings to a climax a tension between "heavy" and "light" that Horace has fostered throughout his three-book collection.

Deducere has several meanings that make it particularly useful as a programmatic poetic word. Its associations with magic, rhetorical persuasion, irrigation, colonization, and triumphal procession can all be employed to indicate poetic power (= ψυχαγωγία) and originality, just as its use in spinning serves as an analogue for poetic refinement. The most immediate sense of *deduxisse* in *Odes* 3.30 is that of colonization, a metaphor for Horace's pioneering work in Latin poetry that gets its start from the "metropolis" of Greek lyric. Ross argued in 1975, however, that *deduxisse* also carries Callimachean overtones of λεπτότης and marks Horace's poetic refinement through an association with weaving. In 2004 Nisbet and Rudd rejected this reading as inconsistent with the grandeur of the collection's finale. Most recently, Acosta-Hughes and Stephens (2012) argue that Callimachean influence is evident throughout Horace's *Odes*, but do not address *deduxisse* specifically.

In favor of Ross' reading, I suggest that *deduxisse* invokes Callimachean refinement in an allusion filtered through *Eclogue* 6.5, where Vergil translates λεπταλέην from *Aetia Prologue* 24 as *deductum*. The resulting conjunction of "heavy" and "light" images in *Odes* 3.30 is not an

undesirable inconsistency, as Nisbet and Rudd suggest, but rather a subtle nod to the problem of literary weight within Callimachean poetics. At *Aetia Prologue* 9f., Callimachus provides an example of a delicate poem that “outweighs” (καθέλκει) its portly counterpart—an ironic twist on Aristophanes’ *Frogs* 1364ff., where Euripides tries unsuccessfully to summon verses that will “outweigh” (καθέλξει) the bombastic language of Aeschylus. Horace adopts this inverted Callimachean model of poetic *gravitas*, claiming a sturdy monumentality for his own poetry—not in spite of, but *because of* its refined slenderness.

This Callimachean tension between “heavy” and “light” is in fact a central facet of Horace’s self-presentation, for both his poetics and his way of life. Among Horace’s many poems in praise of moderation, note the particularly Callimachean flavor of 2.16.37ff., where the poet’s restraint in poetry and life is bound up with his rejection of the masses (*malignum / spernere volgus*), a famous Callimachean sentiment. The same is true for *Odes* 3.1, where the Callimachean opening *odi profanum volgus* sets up an extended criticism of avaricious builders whose construction projects will eventually succumb to the whims of Fortune. This image of temporality serves as a foil for the eternal *monumentum* of Horace’s own poetry as described in the mirror poem 3.30. It is not accidental that Callimachus appears at the opening and close of Book Three, for it is precisely his inverted system of weights that Horace has adopted in arguing that, for poetry and for life, moderation and refinement lead to endurance, whereas dissipation brings only dissolution.

But Horace does not simply adopt Callimachean poetics: he makes a distinctly Latin improvement, employing terminology in his native language that is, in quintessentially Horatian fashion, more economical. The same *deduxisse* that connotes the literary term λεπτότης also translates the verb καθέλκειν, used by Aristophanes and Callimachus to refer to the “drawing

down” of poetic scales. In translating Greek poetry into Latin, Horace has also translated the terms of its literary criticism, availing himself of an economy of expression that both invokes Callimachean λεπτότης and asserts the monumentality of his own work. Horace’s *tenera Musa* thus turns out to be more substantial than she first appears.

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