

Horace and Theocritus: *Ode* 1.17 and the Seduction of the Bucolic

Horace's *Ode to Tyndaris*, 1.17, tantalizes its readers with a puzzling mixture of the peaceful *locus amoenus* and the pleasure-laden seduction of a secret invitation to a lover. Scholars have investigated this poem in terms of its pastoral setting (Pucci, 1975; Putnam 1994), and in terms of its seductive characteristics (Dunn, 1990; Nagel, 2000), but these two key aspects have remained largely separate in the eyes of modern critics. However, when taken together to create an atmosphere that is both bucolic and seductive, the ode itself takes on a new meaning, becoming highly reminiscent of not only the scenery but also the themes of Theocritus's *Idylls*—while other pastoral poets may have inspired Horace, Theocritus in particular seems to motivate this ode, given Horace's tendency to Hellenize his Latin motifs. Whether by promising his lover an environment conducive to singing, or by urging her to competitive performance in the manner of Theocritus's rustics, Horace uses the language and motifs of Theocritus's works to form the perfect retreat to which Tyndaris may escape from her violent urban lover. In typical bucolic fashion, Horace suspends the expectations of reality in order to enchant his would-be paramour: the power of his invitation and of her song within the ode together are able to release Tyndaris from her suffering, and aim to induce her to a newer, safer love affair (Parry, 1988). The bucolic traits of *Ode* 1.17 combine with its mystical elements and call to mind Theocritus's *Idyll* 2, in which the girl Simaetha attempts just such an escape by means of an enchantment. By invoking magical names such as Helen or Circe, Horace further aligns his bucolic setting with an atmosphere of the semi-divine and magical, and by identifying himself with Circe's seductive, supernatural role in the mythological love triangle, Horace transforms his ode from an invitation to a spell of summoning.

The detailed actualities of Tyndaris' life are left purposefully nonspecific, because she herself is not just representative of his present love interest. With a minimization of epic that recalls Theocritus's epyllion of Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11 to express the cure for lovesickness, Horace turns to myth to canonize his own lover's problem. Embedded within this beautiful scene, Tyndaris is set within a heavily-allusive love triangle, in which she is likened to Helen and Odysseus. Horace also neglects to name himself the narrator or to describe his own circumstances, as occurs in the famous *Pyrrha Ode* (1.5). Playing the role of her audience and lover luring her away from her "spouse," Horace serves as our Paris and, by association, our "vitreamque Circe" (literally "glassy Circe"). This love triangle is the key to Horace's romantic agenda, for in identifying Tyndaris and himself with the epic characters, he makes clear that his is a personal, and not philanthropic, invitation. Thus Horace in this ode casts himself as a Roman Circe, seducing and bewitching his beloved; the poem itself mirrors this magic in its own glassy appearance, reflecting the poet's true intentions fracturedly, like ripples on the surface of water.

Until now, scholarship has in large part either minimized or overlooked the effect of Theocritus's work on Horace's *Odes* (Edinger, 1971). With its bucolic elements separated from its romantic allure, the poem itself has not been perceived as a whole: the pastoral setting was not simply chosen at random by Horace, and it does not conflict with the passionate conclusion of the ode. Rather, by viewing the entire ode as both seductive and bucolic, the reader can see the invitation format take on a new form, that of a spell. Horace would thus intensify his position as *vates*—the poet-prophet that he claims so often to be (c.f. *Epode* 16)—with his assumed role of enchanter. The ode itself, previously viewed as being somewhat out of place within Horace's objectives, would find a more fitting role in his overall corpus.

Works Cited

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