

Small and Simple Things: Object, Theme, and Persona in the Lyrics of Catullus and Horace

The symbolism of various objects mentioned in Roman lyric poetry has been well studied. Catullus and Horace represent two major styles of lyric poetry: the personal and emotional, and the courtly and measured. These tones and personae are well recognized, and generally agreed-upon. Less well noted though is how the use of certain types of objects in the lyrics might reflect greater themes and styles within the poet's corpus. The use of small mostly material objects to quietly support each overall theme and style is a shared technique that merits further discussion.

These styles reflect some of the key themes within the poetry, including the meta-poetic interest as well as the poet's worldview, or at least that of their poetic persona. Many objects through the lyrics of Catullus, including a napkin (c.12), books (c.1, 14, 36), a notebook (c.42), and even a dwelling (c.26), are both small and also very much worth fighting for or about. How the poet discusses these objects using the narratives and vocabulary of his poetry reflects a perspective of having to fight for one's self in a harsh world, and the insecurities that might be involved both in life and in poetry.

Horace, on the other hand, speaks more of simple things, not small ones. Objects of simplicity include wine or wine jars (1.20, 1.38, 3.21), a lyre (1.32), myrtle (1.38, 3.23), his country house (3.1) and its pine trees (2.10, 3.22). The vocabulary and presentation of these items throughout the lyrics of Horace serve to highlight his emphasis on a life that is comfortable but not opulent. The confidence in himself projected in the objects, what they mean within their narratives, and language used for them all support the Horatian persona's un-ostentatious sophistication, which extends to the expectation of his poetic legacy as *vates*.

The attention to simplicity and smallness in Horace and Catullus respectively also relates to the poet's representation of their poetic work and its value. Horace expresses a clear wish to make himself and his friends immortal through his poetry, while Catullus seems to use his poetry to deal with insecurities, both personal and professional. The defensive nature of Catullus' discussions of how he might use his poetry alongside the general confidence projected by Horace and his poetic agenda draws a clear connection between the personal poetic project, and the treatment of key objects. The pairing of anger and smallness in much of Catullus plays into the insecurities projected by the poetic persona in much the same way the pairing of simplicity and comfort connect to the unconcerned confidence that Horace's public voice will not need to worry about his poetic goals.

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