

Wild at Heart: *Natura Victrix* in Horace's Letter to Fuscus

Horace reflects upon his friendship with Fuscus and the geographical distance separating them through imagery and metaphors borrowed from nature such as doves, a pastoral scene, an urban garden, a horse and a stag, and a dilapidated temple. Horace argues that to live in the country is to live according to nature (10.12). As has been frequently remarked, Horace turns the stoic *summum bonum* on its head (Dilke 1954, Harrison 1992, Mayer 1994, Fedeli 1997). Additionally, Horace subverts other stoic overtures in order to persuade Fuscus to enjoy the *otium* of the country (Harrison 1992). Less remarked upon is how Horace uses natural themes to argue for the epicurean *summum bonum* which is pleasure without anxiety. Moreover, an occasional Lucretian undertone influences Horace's epicureanism (Mayer 1994). Furthermore, though the epistolary style progresses with conversational ease, this letter is rigorously structured with internal parallels relating to its own argument (Stégen 1960), and external parallels relating to the general themes of the *Epistles* (McGann 1969). Considering the relationship of these natural themes to one another, this paper will argue that as nature works subtly to erode the human structures imposed upon it, so Horace seeks to undermine the stoic values of Fuscus through natural imagery, metaphor, and fable by appealing to the epicurean pursuit of natural desire.

Horace compares their friendship to two doves (*columbi*, 10.5). The metaphor presents the paradox in this letter: Horace loves the country; Fuscus loves the city. He is happy where he lives except that Fuscus is not with him (*cetera laetus*, 10.50). So his own happiness hinges upon his ability to persuade Fuscus to forsake urban pleasure for natural pleasure. Though Fuscus prefers the city, Horace shows how his friend's natural desire is also for the country. Using his knowledge of stoic principles, Horace argues that the desire for nature should not to be resisted (10.12). Horace strategically depicts a pastoral scene in a

series of questions which appeal to natural desire: a gentle breeze, fragrant grass, and a pure brook. Each question asks Fuscus to compare a feature of the country to a feature of the city. Whereas country satisfies and soothes desire, the city inflames the appetite for the pursuit of wealth.

This desire for nature is why the wealthy tend gardens within their villas or why they seek country views (10.21-5). For the Romans, the garden was a space for self-representation (Jones 2014) and for philosophical discourse (Hartswick 2018). For this reason Horace presents the urban garden as a metaphor for human nature and as a space where epicurean and stoic values collide. He describes a garden where nature is contained by columns and windows (10.21-5). The vocabulary of these lines resists the artificial constraints (*rumpere . . . recurret . . . perrumpet*, 10.20-25). In one sentence, nature is transformed from the object (*Naturam expelles*, 10.24) to the subject (*victrix*, 10.25). *Natura victrix* confounds all attempts to subdue her liberty.

In the fable of the horse and stag adapted from Stesichorus (Dilke 1954), the horse is ironically “*victor*” after forfeiting its liberty for a human rider (10.37). A comparison of *victor* with *victrix* demonstrates how the fable parallels the description of the garden while furthering the theme of personal liberty. Forfeiting the security of the country for the security of the city, the horse, a motif throughout the *Epistles* as well as the *De Rerum Natura*, gives up its freedom.

The letter ends with the decaying temple of *Vacuna* (*putre Vacunae*, 10.49). Many have attempted to identify this temple (Dilke 1954, Macleod 1986, Mayer 1994), but more significant is this temple’s thematic contribution to the argument. This temple gives way to *natura victrix* without intervention from its patron deity. As in the image of the garden, nature works secretly (*furtim*, 25) to undermine human structures. As nature undermines this temple, so Horace has sought to undermine his friend’s false desire for the city.

Bibliography

- Harrison, S.J. 1992. "Fuscus the Stoic: Horace Odes 1.22 and Epistles 1.10." *CQ* 2.42.2: 543-547.
- Hartswick, Kim J. 2018. "The Roman Villa Garden." In *Gardens of the Roman Empire*, edited by Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, Kathryn L. Gleason, Kim J. Hartswick, and Amina-Aïcha Malek, 72-86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O.A.W. Dilke. 1954. *Horace: Epistles Book I*. London: Methuen.
- _____, and Paolo Fedeli. 1997. *Q. Orazio Flacco. Le Opere 2. Le Epistole. L'Arte Poetica*. Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello Stato.
- _____, and Roland G. Mayer. 1994. *Horace: Epistles. Book I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, F.M.A. 2014. "Roman Gardens, Imagination, and Cognitive Structure." *Mnemosyne* 67: 781-812.
- McGann, M.J. 1969. *Studies in Horace's first book of Epistles*. Bruxelles: 60 rue Colonel Chaltin.
- Stégen, G. 1960. "L'épître d'Horace à Aristius Fuscus (I, 10)." *Les Études Classiques* XXVIII: 23-29.