



Hypersexism: Hypermnestra in Horace's *Odes* 3.11

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The Danaids

The Danaids are mentioned only to describe their punishments. Though the Danaids were being married to their cousins against their wills and they were ordered by their father to kill their husbands, they are still treated as if it was their violent plan:

"velut nanctae vitulos leanae, / singulos eheu lacerant"

(just as lionesses having stumbled upon calves, alas they are carving their husbands one by one, Garrison Hor. Od. 3.11.41-2).

The Danaids were punished for their crimes against their husbands, but the delight in watching that punishment stems from the desire to punish women who don't abide by gender norms. The Danaids did not serve their new husbands, and thus the audience delights in watching their punishment.

By looking at the gendered language and manipulation of the myth of the Danaids in *Odes* 3.11, it is clear that this is a conversation of an older man trying to seduce and coerce the virginal Lyde. The speaker's bastardized myth diminishes Hypermnestra's accomplishments, risks, and reputation; the Danaids' lack of independence; and Lyde's freedom to choose whether or not to have a relationship.

Lyde

The name Lyde is often used as a name for *betaerae* (Greek courtesans). Horace's *Odes* 2.11:

"quis devium scortum eliciet domo / Lyden?"

(Who might draw out the devious prostitute Lyde?, Hor. Od. 2.11.21-2).

The speaker also shames Lyde for not having a relationship by calling her a mare that needs to be tamed by a husband (Hor. Od. 3.11.9-12). This establishes the motive for the mythological moral invoked by the speaker.

Hypermnestra

The speaker celebrates Hypermnestra for saving Lynceus:

"in omne virgo / nobilis aevum"

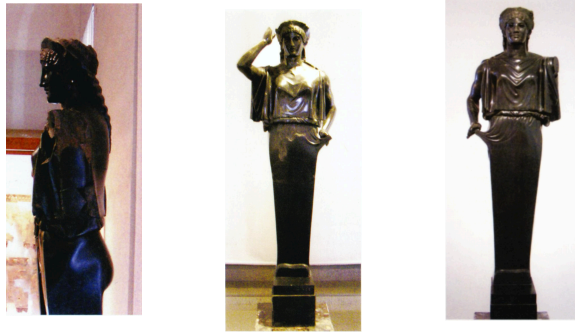
(A woman, noble in every age, Hor. Od. 3.11.35-6)

She risks her life for a man she just married, after they had consummated the marriage. She is celebrated as a woman of unquestionable morals in order to convince Lyde to abide by this example.

The speaker, though, never actually names her. He diminishes her legacy and accomplishments by not naming her and refusing to mention that she founds the Danaid dynasty. He uses her only as a tool to convince Lyde to have a relationship with him.

Conclusion

A critical analysis of Horace's *Odes* 3.11 reveals that the speaker is attempting to seduce the younger Lyde by manipulating the myth of the Danaids and Hypermnestra to punish women who deviate from the sexual norms and reward those who follow them. The poem begins with diminishing Lyde herself in order to offer her the path to glory: serving a man sexually (as exemplified by Hypermnestra in contrast with the punishment of the Danaids).



Images of the statues of the Danaids at the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, which inspired this poem. Quenemoen argues that they are depicted mid-torment, carrying water jugs (Quenemoen 2006).



A depiction of Hypermnestra trapped in her house after Lynceus escapes. This is the scene that inspired Ovid's *Heroides* 14., (Testard)

Bibliography

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