The Horatian Sappho: Sapphic Allusions in *Odes* 2.13

Of all the *Odes,* Sappho's presence looms the largest in 2.13 as the reader is treated to a vision of her in the underworld. While some scholars have argued that Horace emphasizes Alcaeus' superiority over Sappho in this poem (Nisbett and Hubbard 1978), I argue against this reading following other scholars (Woodman 2002, Clay 2010). Sappho's songs receive special attention from Horace for their ability to soothe the dead and monsters of the underworld in 2.13, and as Woodman argues, there are occasions throughout the *Odes* where Horace subtly refers to Sappho, even when ostensibly praising Alcaeus alone. In this paper, I contend that in *Odes* 2.13, the poem's explicit emphasis on Sappho at its close retroactively illuminates allusions to both Sappho 31 and Catullus 51 at its beginning, when the narrator delivers a humorous invective directed against a tree that nearly falls on his head and sends him to the underworld. The repetition of *ille*, and extended relative clauses at the beginning of 2.13 syntactically allude to Sappho 31 and Catullus 51, which likewise fixate on an *ille* or κῆνος. Accordingly, Horace is not betraying a preference for Alcaeus in this ode, but rather endeavors to surpass both lyric poets—perhaps especially Sappho, the mortal Muse, now in the underworld from which Horace's narrator has narrowly escaped.

Odes 2.13 begins as an invective delivered to a tree and ends with a vision of the underworld where the Lesbian poets perform for shades and monsters. The rhetorical triangle between the Horatian narrator of *Odes* 2.13, the tree, and the planter of the tree subtly parodies the triangle between Sappho, the unnamed girl, and the man who sits across from her in fragment 31, or alternatively the Catullan narrator, that man (*ille* 1), and Lesbia in Catullus 51. Horace's series of demonstratives and relative pronouns in *Odes* 2.13 begins with *ille,* prompting the

reader to think about Catullus 51 (and Sappho 31 by extension), and then proceeds with the indefinite relative pronoun *quicumque*, which is more analogous to Sappho's ὄττις (31.2) than to Catullus' *qui* (51.2). Through Horace's various expansions, *ille* remains the subject of the first three stanzas of the poem, becoming even more prominent than Catullus' *ille* which disappears after the first stanza just as the man does in Sappho 31, despite its positional prominence at the beginning of the first two lines.

After examination of the opening lines, I move to Sappho's appearance in the underworld alongside Alcaeus in *Odes* 2.13. Sappho's songs are limited to the private sphere as she complains about the girls of Lesbos (*querentem Sappho puellis de popularibus* 2.13.24-25), while Alcaeus sings of tripled hardships: those of war, sea, and exile. While the crowd prefers Alcaeus' songs – and this observation has led some to assert Horace's preference for Alcaeus – Sappho's songs are soothing to the Furies, Cerberus, and other famous figures in the underworld. Even if the crowd prefers Alcaeus to Sappho, Horace's condemnation of the *vulgus* in the *Odes* 3.1 complicates a straightforward reading of the crowd's preference as the poet's own (*odi profanum vulgus et arceo* 3.1.1). Additionally, Horace's use of *querentem* possibly alludes to a sort of iambic Sappho, whom we may glance at in a select number of the poet's fragments (Rosenmeyer 2006). A hint at an iambic Sappho in Horace's use of *querentem* would permit another connection between Sappho's poetry and the opening of *Odes* 2.13, since Horace frames the invective against the tree as an *opprobrium* (2.13.4), which is a term Horace connects with iambic poetry in *Odes* 1.16.

Bibliography

Clay, J. 2010. "Horace and Lyric Poetry." In *A Companion to Horace*, edited by Gregson Davis, 128-146. Wiley-Blackwell.

Hunter, R. 2018. "Sappho and Latin Poetry: the Case of Horace." In *Roman Receptions of Sappho*, edited by Thea S. Thorsen and Stephen Harrison, 151-163. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nisbet, R. G. M., Hubbard, M. 1978. *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, book II.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rosenmeyer, P.A. 2006. "Sappho's Iambics." *Letras clásicas* 10: 11–36.

Thorsen, T. S. 2018. "Sappho, Alcaeus, and the Literary Timing of Horace." In *Roman Receptions of Sappho*, edited by Thea S. Thorsen and Stephen Harrison, 165- 184. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woodman, T.. 2002. "BIFORMIS VATES: the Odes, Catullus and Greek Lyric." In *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace*, edited by Tony Woodman and Denis Feeney, 53–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.