

Satires and the Odes of social protest. Although it incorporates elements of each, its primary concern is the individual's private relations with himself.

THE CLEOPATRA ODE

From the various Odes discussed in this chapter, certain techniques seem constant enough to be termed characteristic. Most obvious is Horace's fondness for an antithetical arrangement of themes and ideas, and we can watch the verbal contrasts and repetitions that he so often exploits in individual stanzas develop into an architectural control for whole poems. This is not altogether to deny the popular theory of Reincke that each Ode tends to fall into three distinct parts.⁴⁷ Such a dismembering of stanzas is always possible, but usually a more important type of organization can be seen in the balance of ideas and images that an Ode maintains throughout.

In the second place, we notice that Horace consistently employs similes and metaphors not as ornaments of thought, but as methods of thought. To the generations trained on Shakespeare and Donne Horace's figures are not likely to seem remarkable, but if we compare the Odes with the short poems of Catullus, say, or with the works of Tibullus, we must be struck both by the profusion and by the intricacy of Horace's usage. Often he achieves a special economy by counterpointing literal and figurative meanings, thus allying his fondness for antithetical and metaphorical structures. Perhaps, indeed, he found congenial a style based heavily on metaphors precisely because they invited antithetical treatment.

Finally, we may remark a third characteristic, though it is less constant than the other two. That is his genius for weaving history into a poem's essential structure and making a unified fabric of the two. Agrippa's conquests, Praetates' kingdom, and the outrageously evident mansion and land seizures of the *avarus* all become assimilated

death as anything but a motive for a social comedy. On the similar distinction between the treatment of nature in the Satires and in the Odes, see below, 236 ff. 47. G. Reincke, *De tripartita carminum Horatianorum structura* (Berlin, 1929).

as structural elements, and, in each case, as the literal term of an antithesis.

In pushing these various techniques to a delicate extreme, the so-called "Cleopatra Ode" (C. 1.37) offers a paradigm of certain important elements of Horace's imagination. Like C. 2.18, it has more often excited attention as a historical document than as a literary one. We are frequently urged to contemplate its "Welgeschichtliche Bedeutungsschwere," and are reminded that Horace treats the conflict not only of Cleopatra and Octavian but of Egypt and Rome, East and West, the old and the new.⁴⁸ The number of ideological reverberations have obscured the individual quality of Horace's tones:

Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
pulsanda tellus, nunc Salaribus
ornare pulvinar deorum
tempus erat dapibus, sodales.
antehac nefas depromere Caecubum
cellis avitis, dum Capitolio
regina dementis ruinas
funus et imperio parabat
contaminato cum grege turpium
morbo virorum, quidlibet impotens
sperare fortuneque dulci
ebria. sed minuit furorem
vix una sospes navis ab ignibus
mentemque lymphantam Mareotico
redegit in veros timores
Caesar ab Italia volentem
remis adurgens, accipiter velut
mollis columbas aut leporem citus
venator in campis nivalis
Haemoniae, daret ut catenis

48. See W. Will, *Horaz*, 136-37; H. U. Instinsky, *Hermes*, 82 (1954), 126-28. T. Birt, *Horaz' Lieder*, 2 (Leipzig, 1925), 59, speaks of Horace's "politische Muse." For fuller treatment of C. 1.37, and of the criticism of it, see my article, *Phoenix*, 12 (1958), 47 ff.

fatale monstrum: quae generosius
perire quaerens nec muliebriter
expavit ense nec latentis
classe cita reparavit oras,

ausa et iacentem visere regiam

voltu sereno, fortis et asperas

tractare serpentes, ut atrum

corpore conbiberet venenum,

deliberata morte ferocior:

saevis Liburnis scilicet invadens

privata deduci superbo

non humilis mulier triumpho.

[C. 1.37]

Now is the time to drink, comrades, now with unfettered foot to strike the ground, now to honor with Salian feasts the couch of the gods. Before this it was forbidden to draw forth the Caecuban wine from ancestral cellars, as long as a Queen, together with her band of men stained with foul perversion, was preparing mad destruction for the Capitol and ruin for our rule, she being so abandoned as to hope for anything imaginable, drunk as she was upon sweet fortune. But when scarcely a single ship escaped from the flames it lessened her madness, and Caesar reduced her thoughts, inflamed by Mareotic wine, to the stern reality of fear, pursuing her with his galleys as she fled from Italy, like a hawk pursuing soft doves or a swift hunter the hare in the fields of snowy Haemonia, so that he might cast into chains that prodigy of fate. She, seeking to die nobly, did not like a woman tremble at the sword, nor did she repair with her swift fleet to hidden shores. She dared to look upon her fallen palace in serenity, and bravely took to herself the harsh-scaled serpents so that she might drink in their black poison with her whole body, growing fiercer in her premeditated death. She, no humble woman, scorned indeed to be led as a private citizen on board the haughty Liburnian galleys for a proud triumph.

Nunc est bibendum: the opening words at once issue a literal command and state the Ode's articulating image, one that has gone oddly unremarked.⁴⁹ The pun on *libero* (suggesting Liber or Bacchus) prolongs the sense of the Romans' intoxicated joy, which becomes explicit again with the reference to the long-stored-away Caecuban wine (5). The description of Cleopatra, *fortunaque dulci ebria* (11-12) recalls her notorious carousing, yet the phrase's primary force is figurative. Before Actium Cleopatra had been, as it were, drunk with power, and *dementis* (7), *impotens* (10), *furor* (12), and *lymphatium Mareotico* (14) insist upon her heady illusions. Her final drink hovers between literal and figurative—*conbiberet venenum* (28). Drunken irresponsibility has become a higher freedom. She celebrates a triumph as surely as do the Romans, and her drink to yesterday is no less splendid than their toast to tomorrow.

The Ode's moral progress is remarkable. In all the previous poems Horace's sympathies have been unequivocal. We are in no doubt as to whether wars of love are to be preferred to actual wars, inner riches to outer, Sabine farm to spreading mansion. But in the Cleopatra Ode—the name by which we remember it is itself suggestive—antithetical structure implies a double moral commitment. We move from Cleopatra's drunken illusions to her steady-eyed draught of reality, from a public Roman triumph to an individual Egyptian one. The images of hawk and tender dove, hunter and fleeing rabbit, are crucial in that word's truest sense, for they mark the point at which poetic intentions cross (17-24). The comparisons are better calculated to arouse pity than fear, and Caesar's role, in terms of the similes, is not particularly heroic.⁵⁰ The lines act as a kind of pivot to divert our sympathies from Caesar to Cleopatra, and a straightforward song of triumph slides into what has been justly termed a "pangyric of the vanquished queen."⁵¹ Horace's manipulation of fact confirms such an interpretation, for he deliberately magnifies the moral force of Cleopatra's final defiance. He neglects the year which

49. M. Andrewes, in the fullest recent study of Horatian imagery, remarks only on the hunting simile in 17 ff. See *G&R*, 19 (1950), 110.

50. All critics have not agreed with this interpretation. W. H. Alexander finds Horace "self-propagandized by name calling," and reproaches him for "bad taste in the field of 'applied patriotism.'" See *CJ*, 39 (1944), 233.

51. Wilkinson, *Horace*, 133.

actually elapsed between Actium and her suicide; she seems to rise directly from defeat to noble death. He assigns her proud refusal to be led in Caesar's triumph as the sole motive for her suicide, one which other accounts by and large play down.⁵² And finally, he ignores her attempts to cajole Octavian, as she had Caesar and Antony before him. Horace's Cleopatra witnesses her defeat with stoic fortitude, *volui sereno* (26), and then embraces a death worthy of Cato himself.⁵³

The transition from triumphal shout to elegy is mediated rather than impulsive, and the Ode's second half answers the first in contrapuntal detail. In altering the import of the drink imagery, Horace points to a more general shift in attitude. Cleopatra's world, as we first see it, verges on the fantastic. Her notorious band of eunuchs (9–10) or *semi-viri* appears as a disease (*morbo*) or deformation of nature, and furthers the air of unreality surrounding her. To be challenged by a woman's rule was sufficient affront to the Romans, but for Cleopatra's very men to be unmanned added biological insult to political injury. With Actium, Cleopatra's unreal world and dreams of glory shatter upon the fact of Caesar's victory. True fears (15) overwhelm fanciful hopes. Caesar's sober strength crushes the queen's intoxicated fantasies; the juxtapositions are clear, and our sympathies unequivocal.

Horace makes of Actium no less a moral than a military watershed, and the first words after the central similes compel us to qualify, if not reverse, the Ode's initial distinctions. *Generosius* . . . *nec muliebrius expavit*: Cleopatra assumes the prerogatives of her conquerors. *Generosius* implies a specifically Roman sense of "wellborn," and with *nec muliebrius* she sheds the effeminacy of the Egyptian court. She abandons (*nec reparavit*, 24) her dreams of conquest (*funus parabat*, 8),⁵⁴ and her serenity in defeat is the more impressive for

52. Cf. Verg., *A.* 8.709; Prop., 4.6.64 ff.; Vell., 2.87; Suet., *Aug.* 17. Only Plutarch (*Ant.* 84.954b ff.) is close to Horace in his conception of the situation.

53. The similarity to Cato's noble suicide after his defeat at Thapsus is striking; cf. *C.* 1.12.35–36, 2.1.23–24.

54. The contrast is probably deliberate, and dictates the use of *reparavit* (24), an odd word in such a context. It has been frequently emended; see I. Mueller, *Q. Horatius Flaccus, Oden und Epoden* (St. Petersburg, 1900), *ad loc.*

her previous agitation. If her daring remains it is founded on reality: *ausa et iacentem visere regiam volui sereno*. As her delusions diminish (*mentem* . . . *redegit in veros timores Caesar*, 14–16) her presence expands (*invidens privata* . . . *non humilis mulier*), and a rise in her personal stature counterpoints the decline of her public fortunes. Dr. Johnson praised Milton for his "weightily embodied" descriptions, and in Horace's portrayal of Cleopatra's final acceptance of reality we find a comparable denseness of verbal suggestion (26–28). We feel the snake's harsh scales, see its black venom, hear its hiss in the repeated sibilants, and almost taste the poison which Cleopatra "drinks in" with her whole body. *Conbiberet* (28) insists upon the physical immediacy of her final act, and marks how far behind lie the intoxicated dreams of the poem's opening (10–12). *Deliberata* (29) repudiates her previous fantasies, while austere negations (*nec muliebrius*, *nec reparavit*, culminating in *non humilis*) reflect upon her former indulgence. *Superbo non humilis mulier triumpho*—the final sequence of words produces an effect almost impossible to convey in translation, one that epitomizes the double impact of the poem. *Superbo* and *non humilis* are practically identical, and as we read the last line it is easy to forget that *mulier* and *triumpho* are logically opposed. The verbal arrangement suggests that the triumph belongs with Cleopatra as well. "Her life would be eternal in our triumph," declares Shakespeare's Caesar, and Cleopatra's death becomes eternal in her own, for it is she who finally shatters Caesar's dream of leading her a captive.

A comforting rationalization proposes that Horace exalts Octavian's enemy only to magnify Octavian.⁵⁵ Yet not until her defeat does Cleopatra become formidable; it is the change in her character that is responsible for our respect. In the second stanza *regina* and *ruinas* (7) seem practically synonyms rather than subject and object. But the Cleopatra we leave is very different from the one to whom we are introduced. Intoxicated hopes have sobered into a mediated draught; by embracing reality she has overtopped her lofty illusions.

55. See Wickham, *Works of Horace, ad loc.* Wickham believes that Horace, by his admiration for Cleopatra, is merely "bringing out in stronger relief the danger from which Rome has been freed, and the glory of Octavianus, who has conquered no unworthy foe."

Waking from a dream of Roman rule she achieves a Roman nobility; casting off her unnatural world she dies a more than natural heroine. Public catastrophe and private renaissance are simultaneous. Cleopatra's final wrought serenity signals her triumph over Fortune's reverses, and, Phoenixlike, she rises from the ashes of her own defeat.

Horace's divided sympathies complicate a characteristic technique. The balance of figurative and literal is familiar from other poems, though the antitheses are more elaborate than usual. The Romans' festive drink is opposed to Cleopatra's finally triumphant one, which contrasts as well with her earlier intoxication. Paradoxically, it is her literal drunkenness which produces her illusions, while her figurative drink (*conbibere venenum*, 28) represents her final awareness of reality. The correspondences and ironies are as intricate as those between the Sabine farm, the mansion of the *avarus*, and the *aula Orci* in C. 2.18. By maintaining a single image and refracting it into different aspects, both literal and figurative, Horace shapes the Ode into a tense unity.

The poem provides a model, not only of a characteristic structural technique, but of Horace's alchemy of history as well. The elements were all common knowledge. Propertius needed only to refer to Cleopatra's notorious fondness for drink:

"non hoc, Roma, fui tanto tibi cive verenda!"
dixit et assiduo lingua sepulta mero. [3.11.55-56]

"You need not have feared me, Rome, with such a citizen as this to protect you!" So spoke the tongue which constant draughts of wine had overwhelmed.

Her band of eunuchs had an equally bad reception. Horace himself, in an Epode written either during or immediately after the battle of Actium, dwelt upon them in fascinated detail:

Romanus eheu—posteri negabitis—
emancipatus feminae
fert vallum et arma miles et spadonibus
servire rugosis potest

94

interque signa turpe militaria
sol aspexit canopium. [Epod. 9.11-16]

A Roman, alas—you who come in later times will deny it—
having surrendered himself to a woman, carries stakes and
arms for her, and, though a soldier, he can bring himself to
serve withered eunuchs, and among the military standards
the sun shines upon the shameful Egyptian pavilion.

Here Horace mentions the eunuchs only for the sake of invective. The Ode does more than recollect the same emotions in greater tranquility. Cleopatra's intervening suicide compelled Horace to a fresh consideration which distinguishes the Ode from its predecessor. The Epode's pure cry of triumph (*io Triumphe . . . io Triumphe*, 21, 23) modulates into the ambiguity of *superbo triumpho* (31-32); abuse of the effeminate Egyptian court becomes balanced by Cleopatra's rejection of womanly fear; festive invitation (*capaciores adler huc, puer, scyphos*, 33) ramifies into a dialectic of symbolic drinks. The two poems provide an instructive example of the way narrative elements in the Epodes tend to become structural ones in the Odes. Blending the familiar tales about Cleopatra's drinking and about her retinue of eunuchs with other equally well-known facts—her hopes of Roman rule, her final repudiation of womanhood, her royal death—Horace transmutes all alike into an organic whole. We cannot, as we can with Propertius, isolate the references to drinking. Remove them and the poem collapses. History has been concentrated into image, and image has become inseparable from the poem's structure and meaning.

For a parallel, whether of technique or of attitude, we must look not to Horace's contemporaries but to Shakespeare's retrospective vision in *Antony and Cleopatra*. As Horace builds the Ode upon different types of drinking, so Shakespeare concentrates the opposition of social values and human ones in the single image of melting or dissolution. In these terms we see Antony's downfall, as he becomes "the ebb'd man." "Our fortune sinks most lamentably," he cries; or again, "authority melts from me!" Yet there is a melting with as well as a melting from, and in the idea's sexual suggestion Shakespeare

95

conjures up the individual rebirth which Antony achieves with Cleopatra:

the higher Nilus swells
The more it promises: as it ebbs, the seedman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

On Shakespeare's boards the conflict is played out principally in terms of Antony, in whom love vies with honor, East with West. Horace could hardly share the Englishman's distanced perspective, and even had he felt free to treat the subject in the same way it is unlikely that he would have anticipated Shakespeare's tacit verdict, and Dryden's explicit one, that the world was well lost. Yet both Horace and Shakespeare recognized the interplay between Caesar's national victory and Cleopatra's individual one. Taking from North's Plutarch the events Horace knew at first hand, Shakespeare built them into the structure of his work by a technique reminiscent of Horace's own. His antitheses echo those of the Ode even as they elaborate upon them. A public sense of history informs the play. We watch an emerging empire triumph over a decaying dynasty, masculine Roman over effeminate Egyptian, land force over sea power, grave sobriety over light sport, foursquare *virtus* over devious love, youth over age—the contrasts are all the playwright's own. Yet private lives play against public issues, and the counterpoint is familiar. Leaving aside her womanhood—

My resolution's plac'd and I have nothing
Of woman in me—

Cleopatra rises by "a Roman death" to an ultimate victory over Rome's very founder:

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our springing port, make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

Horace's perspective, both because of his historical involvement and because of the necessarily more restricted range of lyric, makes any

comparison with Shakespeare seem indecorous. Yet the similarities in structural technique are striking, while the differences are more profound quantitatively than qualitatively. Nor is Horace's attitude, Roman though he was, so far from that of the dramatist. For he was, we should remember, the first poet to recognize what history was to confirm, that in Cleopatra the world had borne a "lass unparalleled."

In a well-known study, J. Middleton Murray defined "the problem of style" as one of communication.⁵⁶ How can we make words adequate to experience, how give instead of describe, convey rather than flatly state? Murray found the best if necessarily evasive answer in Stendhal, whose definition at least preserves the terms of the problem:

Le style est ceci: ajouter à une pensée donnée toutes les
circonstances propres à produire tout l'effet que doit pro-
duire cette pensée.

If Horace's Odes demonstrate anything, it is the radical integrity of "pensée donnée" and "circonstances." The time-honored opposition of the *utile* and the *dulce* is pernicious in implication, for it assumes a split between an essential meaning and some decorative means used in conveying it. For a poem the length of the *De Remum Natura* the sugared pill may prove an efficacious mode of discourse, but it can hardly be effective in shorter works, where our imagination must be compelled at the same time as our reason. Yet attempts to separate the formal elements of an Ode—structure and figures, sounds and rhythms—from its "meaning" are persistent. We hear, for instance, that the appeal of Horace is twofold: "the forms in which he expressed himself, and the substance of which they are the garment. We shall find him distinguished in both; but in the substance of his message we shall find him distinguished by a quality which sets him apart from other poets ancient and modern."⁵⁷ Had Horace believed in such a division between form and substance he would probably have written prose. In protesting against the "purple patch" (4. P. 15-16) which authors sewed onto their work, Horace reproached a whole of theory of style, and in offering instead the analogy

56. *The Problem of Style* (Oxford, 1922), 71 ff.

57. G. Showerman, *Horace and His Influence* (New York, 1931), 3.

of a living creature (A. P. 1 ff.) he anticipated the nineteenth century's concern for organic form. Wordsworth and Coleridge insisted that language be the "Flesh-Garment, the Body, of Thought," and De Quincey expatiated upon their identity:

The more closely any exercise of mind is connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities,—that is, with what is philosophically termed subjective,—precisely in that degree, and the more subtly, does the style or the embodying of the thoughts cease to be a mere separable ornament, and in fact the more does the manner, as we expressed it before, become confluent with the matter . . .

If language were merely a dress, then you could separate the two; you could lay the thoughts on the left hand, the language on the right. But, generally speaking, you can no more deal thus with poetic thoughts than you can with soul and body. The union is too subtle, the intertexture too ineffable,—each co-existing not merely *with* the other but each *in* and *through* the other. An image, for instance, a single word, often enters into a thought as a constituent part. In short, the two elements are not united as a body with a separable dress, but as a mysterious incarnation.⁵⁸

And so it is with the Odes, where the ideas work not merely "with" but "in and through" Horace's specific language. If we change any element of his language a different idea remains—or no idea at all. To speak of a lyric poet's "message" is meaningless except in terms of the forms in which he creates it. Art, in one sense, is simply the form we impose on life, and once we forget Horace's, or any poet's, medium in the search for his message, we may as well cease reading poetry altogether.

58. *Collected Writings*, Masson, ed., 10 (London, 1890), 229. Cf. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1953), 290-91.

III

QUALITIES OF IMAGINATION

THE question of "the man and the work" is perennially tempting. With Horace the balance between the two has proved precarious. Enthusiasm for the author of the Odes frequently leads us to neglect its cause and justification, the Odes themselves:

The man Horace is more interesting than his writings, or, to speak more correctly, the main interest of his writings is in himself. We might call his works "Horace's Autobiography." To use his own expression about Lucilius, his whole life stands out before us as in a picture. Of none of the ancients do we know so much, not of Socrates, or Cicero, or St. Paul. Almost what Boswell is to Johnson, Horace is to himself. We can see him, as he really was, both in body and soul. Everything about him is familiar to us. His faults are known to us, his very foibles and awkwardnesses . . . He seems almost as a personal friend.¹

Though this was written in the late nineteenth century, its assumptions have shown themselves persistent. We have all become familiar with the image of a man rotund and balding, convivial if sometimes irascible; of a gentleman farmer and urbane socialite who moved placidly through life. The Satires and Epistles tell us enough about the facts of Horace's existence to encourage us to draw upon our intuition for the gaps, and to use the result as a context in which to read the Odes. "He never thought of marrying, he was never in love;