

## Horace's *Odes*

- *Odes* = lyric poetry, looking back to Greek lyric poetry by poets such as Alcaeus and Pindar
- Written under Augustus. Books 1-3: 24/23 BC; Book 4: c. 13 BC.

1) "The virtues of irony and sense, that distinguish Horace from most poets, desert him in the political odes" (Nisbet and Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book 1*, xviii)

### A) Potential problems

i) writing about Augustus and regime: hard to criticize, easy to laud; how do you address Augustus? Human/divine? Didn't allow Romans to worship him as a present deity but son of a god and linked with the cults of *Divus Julius* and *Venus genetrix* (ancestress of the Julian family)

ii) Horace's own personal situation: ex-republican; patronized by Maecenas, Augustus' right-hand man. Danger of appearing insincere or critical

2) "With you beside me I experienced Philippi and its headlong rout, leaving my little shield behind without much credit" (Hor. *Odes* 2.7.9-10)

iii) politics in poetry: Alexandrian Callimachus' refusal to write of kings and heroes taken up by Vergil *Eclogue* 6 (Apollo stops him singing of "kings and battles") and Propertius (writes about love, not Augustus' battles). Perceived to be difficult to write crafted poetry on politics

3) "The Telchines, who know nothing / of poetry and hate the Muse, often / snipe at me, because it's not a monotonous / uninterrupted poem featuring kings / and heroes in thousands of verses / that I've produced" (Callimachus *Aitia* 1 prologue, tr. Nisetich 1-6)

- crude praise? See 1.2 (Augustus as god), 1.12, and 1.37 (Actium: East v West)

4) "What divinity are the people to call upon to restore the fortunes of their crumbling power?" (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.25-6)

5) "Or you, o winged son of kindly Maia, if you take on the shape of a young man on earth and are willing to be called Caesar's avenger" (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.41-44: Mercury-Augustus)

6) "Here rather may you enjoy glorious triumphs, here may you be glad to be called Father and First Citizen, and refuse to allow the Medes to ride unpunished while you are our leader, Caesar." (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.49-52)

7) "[Jupiter] Father and protector of the human race, o son of Saturn, you have been entrusted by fate with the care of mighty Caesar; may you have Caesar as vice-regent of your kingdom." (Hor. *Odes* 1.12.49-52)

8) "at a time when the queen, along with her troop of disgustingly perverted men, was devising mad ruin for the Capitol and death for the empire." (Hor. *Odes* 1.37.6-10; effeminate East)

## **B) Solutions**

- BUT not unadulterated praise; 1.2 conditional clause (41), Mercury parallel surprising (no official link with Augustus)

9) “The ode is unique as being the only contemporary poem which intimates that Augustus is not who he seems to be but an Olympian god disguised as a man” (White, *Promised Verse*, p.178, of *Odes* 1.2)

- tactics e.g. obliquity, humour, imagination

10) “The young generation, diminished by their parents’ crimes, will hear how citizens sharpened the sword which should rather have slain the deadly Parthians, and will hear the wars they fought.” (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.21-4, of civil war)

11) “[portents]... terrified the people for fear the disastrous age of Pyrrha should return, who cried aghast at unheard-of marvels, when Proteus drove all his seals to visit the high mountains, and the race of fish became lodged in the tops of elm trees, which before had been the home of doves” (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.5-10, i.e. worry there might be another flood)

- tactics e.g. intertextuality. Vergil's *Georgics* (pub. c. 29 BC) had recounted omens such as lightning and floods which foreshadowed Julius Caesar's assassination/civil war >prayer for Octavian as saviour. In *Odes*, Augustus is that saviour and can now attend to imperial expansion

12) “Eridanus, king of rivers, washed away forests in the swirl of his mad eddy, and all across the plains swept cattle and stalls alike” (Vergil, *Georgics* 1.482-3: portent of assassination/civil war)

13) “Never did more lightnings fall from a cloudless sky” (Vergil, *Georgics* 1.488-9, portent)

14) “Gods of my country, heroes of the land, Romulus, and your mother Vesta,..., at least do not prevent this young prince [Octavian] from helping a world turned awry!” (Vergil, *Georgics* 1.498-501)

15) “may you ...refuse to allow the Medes to ride unpunished while you are our leader, Caesar.” (Hor. *Odes* 1.2.51-2: Persians should be punished)

- 1.37: sympathy and some admiration for Cleopatra; allusion to Callimachus helps recall Cleopatra's relationship with Julius Caesar and Antony. Mischievous!

16) “like a hawk after a gentle dove or a speedy hunter after a hare on the snowy plains of Thessaly” (Hor. *Odes* 1.37.17-20, of Augustus chasing Cleopatra)

17) “...determined, no doubt, to cheat the cruel Liburnians: she would not be stripped of her royalty and conveyed to face a jeering triumph: no humble woman she.” (Hor. *Odes* 1.37.30-2; “triumph” last word)

18) “Up and down the hillsides, on the track / of every rabbit, every deer- that's your hunter, / Epikydes, braving frost and snow. But if someone says, / ‘There it is, wounded!’, he leaves it

alone. / My passion is like his..." (Callimachus *Epigram* 1.1-5 Nisetich: lover as hunter)

- Avoids addressing Augustus until Book 4 (1.2: Mercury; 1.6: Agrippa). Maecenas often addressed instead (human, fallible)

19) "... this was the man who, at the very time when the state was embroiled in civil strife, when the city was in difficulties and under martial law, was attended in public by two eunuchs- both of them more men than himself ... this was the man who had but one wife, and yet was married countless times" (Seneca *Epist.* 114.6; tr. R. M. Gummere)

- Engagement with issue of addressing Augustus. 1.12 initially reverses order of Pindar's 2<sup>nd</sup> Olympian ode (i.e. gods, heroes, men) to man, hero, god then in course of poem goes back to Pindaric order (gods e.g. Jupiter; heroes e.g. Hercules; men e.g. Romulus). Is Augustus god, man or hero?

20) "What man or hero do you choose to celebrate with lyre or shrill pipe, Clio? What God?" (Hor. *Odes* 1.12.1-3)

21) "Ye hymns that rule the lyre! what god, what hero, aye, and what man shall we loudly praise? Verily Zeus is the lord of Pisa; and Heracles established the Olympic festival, from the spoils of war; while Theron must be proclaimed by reason of his victorious chariot with its four horses..." (praise of Theron in Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 2.1-6; tr. J. E. Sandys)

22) "In Horace's Rome, the categories of god, hero, man are not what they were in Pindar's Greece ... the poem moves to its climatic evocation of Augustus as the one who straddles all three categories at once" (Feeney, *Literature and religion at Rome*, p.111)

- Horace draws attention to awkward personal circumstances such as civil war past (e.g. 2.7; 3.14); presents need for Augustus; signs of independence

23) "If any delay occurs on account of the odious doorman, come away. My graying hair is mellowing my temper, which used to be eager for wrangling and impulsive brawls. I would not have put up with this sort of thing in my hot-blooded youth when Plancus was consul. [i.e. 42 BC, year of Philippi]." (Hor. *Odes* 3.14.24-8)

24) "I shall not be afraid of insurrection or violent death while Caesar is in charge of the world." (Hor. *Odes* 3.14.14-6)

- Patronage by Maecenas: no suggestion of pressure

25) "You will drink from modest cups a cheap Sabine wine" (Hor. *Odes* 1.20.1-2)

26) "my cups are not mellowed by the vines of Falernum or Formian hillsides" (Hor. *Odes* 1.20.10-12)

27) "I have a jar full of Alban wine that has lived for over nine years." (Hor. *Odes* 4.11.1-2: i.e. has expensive wine in other poems..)

- Maecenas presented as friend, drinking companion. Lowly clients don't invite patrons to their house

- politics in poetry: Greek lyricists as model (esp. Pindar; Alcaeus)

28) lyre: “You were first tuned by a citizen of Lesbos [Alcaeus]” (Hor. *Odes* 1.32.5)

29) “...you, Alcaeus, with your golden plectrum singing in more resonant tones about the harshness of life at sea, the bitter harshness of exile, the harshness of war!” (Hor. *Odes* 2.13.26-8)

30) “The ghosts marvel at both as they sing of things that demand a reverent silence; but the crowd, packed shoulder to shoulder, drink in more eagerly with their ears tales of battles and banished tyrants.” (Hor. *Odes* 2.13.29-32: crowd prefer Alcaeus to Sappho)

31) “Now let the drinking begin! Now let us thump the ground with unfettered feet!” (Hor. *Odes* 1.37.1-2)

32) “Now we must drink with might and main, / get drunk, for Myrsilus is dead!” (Alcaeus, fragment 332; tr. West): Cleopatra tyrant like tyrant Myrsilus

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