

ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.	LX.	2024.	pp. 45–56.
--	-----	-------	------------

## THE TWO METAMORPHOSES IN HORACE'S SECOND ROMAN ODE<sup>1</sup>

by Attila Ferenczi

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

[attila.ferenczi@gmail.com](mailto:attila.ferenczi@gmail.com)

ORCID 0000-0002-8923-0042

*Abstract:* It has always been a much-debated question how the two final stanzas of Horace's Second Roman Ode fit to what came before in this poem. This paper will venture to place the apparent anomaly of these two verses within a new context emphasizing the strong and traditional connection between the constitution of the Roman State and the *pax deorum*. The second section of the poem (verses 5–6) portrays the workings of *virtus* as something incompatible with the usual ways and protocols of the late Republican political procedure in Rome. The all-changing effects of the Augustan transformations can be regarded as an inevitable consequence of the nature of the *virtus*, but at the same time, it can cause religious anxiety from somebody seeing and understanding this transformation. The last two verses about a religious panic do not contrast with the poem's previous passages but represent a new voice in the political discourse.

*Keywords:* subversive power of *virtus*, constitution of the Roman state, religious anxiety, clash between mythical hero and the historical state, extraordinary

'*Quest' ode pare a me la piu difficile, forse la sola difficile di tutto di ciclo,*' says Pasquali in his monograph on Horace. It was that much-debated question, the one regarding how the ode's two final verses fit to what came before, that the great Italian scholar found to be the knottiest.<sup>2</sup> Commenting a full half century later, Virginia Jameson would attempt to sell her audience on the admitted inconsistency with reference to aesthetic arguments, yet even she called the thoughts it expressed 'puzzling' in the context of the overall poem.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I will venture to place the long-standing anomaly of these two verses within a new context. I am convinced that the connection between the ideas

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written with the support of the Hungarian National Research Development and Innovation Office's (NFKI) grant no. 124232.

<sup>2</sup> (Pasquali 1920, 668)

<sup>3</sup> (Jameson 1984, 219): 'The two stanzas (seven and eight) devoted to *fidele silentium*, coming as they do immediately after the description in stanza six of the climactic ascent of *virtus* toward heaven, constitute an anticlimax verging on a non sequitur.' (Horace és Woodman 2022, 93): 'the transition at lines 25–6 is extremely puzzling: it is as if H. expects his readers to be aware of some unspoken background or context which will help to articulate his sequence of thought.' See also the summary of the problem at Gregson Davis: Davis 1983, 9–13.

found in the poem will become clear if we take a lighter approach to Horace's political views than have those who came before us. The puzzling structure is a consequence of interpretation: if we can modify our understanding of the verses preceding the transition, the contrast will appear much less harsh. First, we will consider the text itself.

<i>angustam famice† pauperiem pati robustus acri militia puer condiscat et Parthos ferocis vexet eques metuendus hasta</i>		<i>virtus, repulsae nescia sordidae intaminatis fulget honoribus, nec sumit aut ponit securis arbitrio popularis aurae.</i>	20
<i>vitamque sub divo et trepidis agat 5 in rebus. Illum ex moenibus hosticis matrona bellantis tyranni prospiciens et adulta virgo</i>		<i>virtus, recludens inmeritis mori caelum, negata temptat iter via coetusque vulgaris et udam spernit humum fugiente penna.</i>	
<i>suspiret, eheu, ne rudis agminum sponsus lacessat regius asperum 10 tactu leonem, quem cruenta per medias rapit ira caedes.</i>		<i>est et fideli tuta silentio 25 merces: vetabo, qui Cereris sacrum vulgarit arcanae, sub isdem sit trabibus fragilemque mecum</i>	
<i>dulce et decorum est pro patria mori: mors et fugacem persequitur virum, nec parcat inbellis iuventae poplitibus timidove tergo. 15</i>		<i>solvat phaselon. saepe Diespiter neglectus incesto addidit integrum. 30 raro antecedentem scelestum deservit pede Poena claudō.<sup>4</sup></i>	

A youngster should be toughened by the rigours of a soldier's life, and learn how to put up with the constraints of poverty cheerfully. He should harass the fierce Parthians on horseback, spreading panic with his spear, and spend his life in dangerous situations under the open sky. When they look at him from the enemy's battlements, let the wife of the warring potentate and her grown-up daughter sigh: 'O that my princely fiancé, who has no experience of battle, may not provoke the lion that is savage to the touch and whose rage for blood sends him rampaging through the thick of the carnage!'

It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. Death hunts down also the man who runs away, and has no mercy on the hamstrings of the unwarlike youth and his cowardly back. A man's true worth does not acknowledge a demeaning rebuff, but shines forth with its glory undimmed; it does not take up or lay down the axes of authority at the people's whim. Their true worth opens the gates of heaven to those who do not deserve to die; it ventures to make its way by a path denied to others, and spurns the vulgar crowd and the damp earth with its soaring wing.

There is also a sure reward for loyal silence. I will forbid anyone who has divulged the secrets of mystic Ceres to be under the same roof or to cast off a fragile boat with me on board. When slighted, Jupiter often lumps the righteous together with the impious; rarely does Retribution fail to catch up with the criminal despite her limping gait. (Tr. N. Rudd)

---

4 Text: Shackleton Bailey, Stuttgart 1985.

## The first metamorphosis

The first four of the ode's eight verses deal with the question of military excellence. The two subsequent paint the image of the politician as a 'man of virtue.' The final two verses, then, deal with the behaviour to be expected of initiated believers of mystery religions. The first point I would like to demonstrate is why, in my interpretation, Verse five does not form a unit with those before it, as many have supposed.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the word 'virtue,' which appears in the middle of the poem as the first word of the verse, is repeated at the beginning of the verse to follow. In fact, the concept of *virtus* occupies a central position within the Roman values system and, stemming from the root *vir*, meaning 'man,' must be regarded as one of the most Romanesque of words. *Virtus* encompasses the range of qualities ascribed in Roman thought to the ideal man. Accordingly, it most frequently refers to combativeness, courage in battle, and other traits viewed as assets in the military context: strength, belligerence, indefatigability, and even technical knowledge. It is in this sense that we encounter the word in most heroic epics, from Ennius to Vergil, and in this sense that it often appears in the tragedies, as well.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the range of meanings associated with *virtus* is considerably broader than that falling within the scope of military excellence. For example, it is frequently encountered in reference to an abstract moral category, in particular when used as the Latin equivalent of the Greek *aretē*. The most famous example of this appears in Lucilius: '*virtus, scire homini rectum utile quid sit, honestum / quae bona, quae mala item, quid inutile, turpe, inhonestum* [virtue is knowing what is right and useful and honourable for a man and what things are good, and again what are bad, what is shameful, useless]....' (frg. 1345–46, Tr. E. H. Warmington).<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, this concept that Horace places in the (literal) centre of his composition. Could it be for this reason that the word is absent from the initial verses, where he speaks of military accomplishment: because the concept is such a Roman one, whereas the images of heroism presented there derive from the Greek cultural and literary milieu of the past? In any case, one can only imagine the Roman listener/reader sitting on pins and needles, waiting for the word to crop up in culmination of that lengthy series of allusive imagery. Clearly, the poem's effectiveness rests on the mechanism of the gradual build-up; and when the word is finally uttered, its meaning is not entirely what might have been expected in the wake of Verses 1 through 4. It is not simply military excellence here, but, of course, not entirely inde-

---

5 The two part partition is the prevailing one: Collington 1961 102; Syndikus (2001 25), and Davis (1983 14) suggest a partition into 3 + 3 + 2. The partition into three parts I recommend here is found in Pöschl (Pöschl 1977, 22–24), and Nisbet and Rudd 2004 22.

6 (Eisenhut 1973, 30)

7 The fragment numbering here follows the convention used by Krenkel. Krenkel 1970)

pendent of it, either, being rather an all-embracing value.<sup>8</sup> Because the next two verses invoke Roman political language and institutional systems, the man of *virtus* here can only refer to not a warrior, but a statesman: a person seeking victory over his opponents not on the battlefield, but in the public assembly or some other arena where political power is exercised. The section dealing with the acquisition of military virtue, having departed in the first lines of the poem from an idealised portrayal of military training, concludes in Verse 4 with the familiar *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (13), thus rounding out the four-verse unit with the image of heroic death on the battle-field. In the fifth, the theme is no longer that of military heroism, as indicated, among other things, by the author's word usage.

*Virtus* does not acknowledge a demeaning rebuff. Here, the word '*repulsa*' refers primarily to the type of rebuff encountered by a candidate who competes unsuccessfully for political office. As office-holders were selected from a group of candidates by the *comitia centuriata*, those who did not achieve a desired position were indeed rejected, and it is to this that the noun *repulsa* refers. It was an experience even well-known politicians of high authority might occasionally be forced to accept. In the words of Caesar: '*Catonem veteres inimicitiae Caesaris incitant et dolor repulsae*. [Motivating Cato were his long-standing enmity with Caesar and the sting of electoral defeat]' (*BC*. 1, 4 Tr. Cynthia Damon). Another potentially apt example is found in Cicero, who, speaking of Laelius, noted that sometimes even excellent candidates were rejected at the public assembly: '*Similemne putas C. Laeli unum consulatum fuisse, et cum quidem cum repulsa (si, cum sapiens et bonus vir, qualis ille fuit, suffragiis praeteritur, non populus (a bono consule) potius quam ille (a bono populo) repulsam fert* [Do you think there has been a resemblance between the one consulship of C. Laelius, and that only granted after the populace had first rejected him (if, when a wise and good man, as he was, is passed over at the election, it is not the populace that is rejected by the good consul rather than he by the populace)]....?' (*Tusc. Disp.* 5, 19, 54, Tr. J. E. King).<sup>9</sup>

Though we cannot know for certain whether the word '*repulsa*' was meant to recall these or, for that matter, any other concrete events, there can be little denying the shades of late-republican volatility on display here: the consul elections and accompanying campaign seasons (*ambitus*) with participant ambition in excess of the opportunities the traditional *res publica* had to offer. The contemporary viewer would have observed even a person of unusual talent, such as Caesar, finding this order difficult to bear: because there were often multiple candidates for a single post and not everyone could be a consul, not every can-

<sup>8</sup> See on this: (Hobbs 2006, 128–34)

<sup>9</sup> Also important to interpretation of the concept of *repulsa*: Cicero: *De officiis*, 1. 21. 71; and Plutarch: *Cato Minor*, 50.

didate enjoyed success, making *repulsa* a natural part of the system. Though of course, failure did not bring glory to the rejected, as evinced (among other things) by the texts cited above, nor did it further in any way one's political career, even so, it was not in and of itself indication that a person lacked virtue.<sup>10</sup> The ode's strongest censure comes with the adjective *sordidus*, according to which the 'rebuff' was humiliating, demeaning, shameful, and even expressly besmirching of one's reputation.<sup>11</sup> But who here is the 'focaliser'? Who is the one describing the system, with its inherent potential for failure, as 'besmirching'? The ambitious bearer of *virtus*, or the poetic narrator, who holds unwaveringly to his affirmative stance?<sup>12</sup>

The next line, however, renders the previous shocking statement entirely incomprehensible: *virtus*, it says, knows no rules, proceeding as it were upon a forbidden path, or at least upon a path that is forbidden to others (*negata via*), nor does it wait for the approval of the crowd to seize power, nor relinquish that power merely because it has lost public support.<sup>13</sup> The word *aurae* (wind/whim) evokes the numerous tropes associated with the standard critiques of democracy of antiquity: the support of the people, which stems from a values system that is neither ethical, nor well-reasoned, will be fleeting and unreliable, will be taken from those to whom it was previously given, and will frequently raise up the unworthy.<sup>14</sup> The central tone of Verses 5 and 6 is one of negation: *repulsa*,

---

10 Horace himself might also be quoted here. In *Ep.* 1, 1, 42 we have: *Vides, quae maxima credis esse mala, exiguum censum, turpemque repulsam / quanto devites*, which speaks of the improper mental posture of the man of the masses. Of course, the conclusion that upon reaching lower taxation status or failing at a bid for political office, the thing to do was to buy a ship and turn to commerce could not have come from the top.

11 In the lines referenced above, Theodor Mommsen offers a convolutedly gratuitous interpretation of the line, thus exempting him from confronting its almost embarrassing simplicity: *Die Ehren des Tapferen haben nichts zu schaffen mit dem unsauberen Treiben des Wahlgeschäfts*. (Mommsen 1905, 172)

12 At *Ep.* 1, 1, 43: *turpemque repulsam* (cited above in n. 9) the case is clearly one of focalisation of the person addressed. In general, people find all sorts of things shameful that do not affect the wise. It is the addressee who experiences humiliation in defeat.

13 I find Günther's musings on this both typical, and unconvincing. His description of the confusion on the part of analysts is apt, so I will offer it here verbatim: on the surface it means 'a way that is denied (to ordinary men),' but in context *negata* also implies the recognition 'denied' to the virtuous by the crowd. (Günther 2013, 384, 624. j). In opposition to Günther's argument, we might quote Seneca's *Hercules furens*: *inveniet viam / aut faciet* (276 sk) or: *nulla si retro via / iterque clausum est, orbe diducto redi!* (280 sk). In Seneca, Hercules is the champion of *thymos*, who, surpassing all limitations and boundaries, presses ever toward his goals—in this case from the underworld toward the world of mortals, just as in Horace, the direction of travel is from the mortal to the immortal realm.

14 Though this is a frequent image in Horace, its origins can be traced back to Greek poetry. The political weight of the statement is made clear by Newman: 'The passage in general is Platonic in inspiration, and that always lends nobility. For that very reason, however, its lofty tone betrays one pregnant, Augustan weakness, and that lies in its contempt for what Americans like

*nescius, intaminatus, nec sumit, inmeritus, negatus, spernere*. The path leading from the mortal to the immortal realm opens up to him who, on the one hand, does not deserve death (*immeritis*, 21), and on the other, is forbidden from going that way (for whom the path is ‘*negata*,’ 22). Traditionally, commentators have tried to dull the shock of this phrase by adding to it the following: ‘forbidden to common mortals’.<sup>15</sup> In general, they ‘expel by interpretation’ all subversive content from the passage: ‘Horace cannot be saying that *virtus* treads paths it cannot *itself* take...’<sup>16</sup> Clearly what he thinks is that it treads paths forbidden to *others*, and so *virtus* is not altering, but rather accommodating the order of things. *Virtus* walks on roads open to it, but closed to others. The *immeritus* here reinforces this affirmative posture: while it is the poet’s judgement that ‘virtue shining forth’ merits eternal life—immortality—the adjective *negata* expresses the Romans’ traditional doubt with regard to such transformation. The expression encompasses not only the struggle of *virtus* for everlasting life, but also the struggle of the external observer in interpreting the phenomenon.

The passage, in short, is about the rejection of the usual, the everyday, the standard. Standing counter *virtus* at the highest level is the order by which all abide. However, if we stop at the conclusions we have drawn so far, we miss the intellectual provocation in Horace’s words—that what exalted *virtus* rejects as common and hence, inapplicable to itself is, in fact, the general order of the Roman republic itself; the lawful political order that has been defined as the historical essence of Roman-ness; the one that explains—demonstrates as logically, even ethically inevitable—Rome’s power over other peoples. The adaptation of Stoic notions of the ideal state to the historical reality of Rome attributes near-religious significance to Rome’s ‘mixed’ constitution, its *miktē politeia*, which brought together *ratio* and *res*. Yet it is precisely this order the *virtus* of the ode labours to transcend. *Virtus*, having the strength and intensity to elicit immortality, is simultaneously the destroyer of customary forms, a power that simultaneously destroys and constructs; but Horace’s imagery leaves no doubt that what *virtus* is set to destroy is, in fact, the ancestral constitutional framework.

Thus, mythical heroism that transcends the usual human dimension in the archaic sense (*pleion ti ē kata anthrōpous*)<sup>17</sup> enters into conflict with the order of the state. Achilles, in other words, is not a good citizen. In one of the scenes from Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*, the characters debate whether they should call

---

to call “the democratic process”. *Vox dei* here is hardly *vox populi*.’ (Newman 2011, 53) Other appearances of the metaphor: Vergilius, *Aen.* 6, 816; Cic. *Pro Cluentio* 47; Sen. *Her. Fur.* 169 sk.

15 (Borzsák 1975 *ad loc.*)

16 Lately Woodman (ad v. 17): but the references to the electoral and political process would then seem crude and undiplomatic, diminishing the all-powerful position of the *princeps*.

17 Cassius Dio 24.30.

Alcibiades back to Athens, and there, Aeschylus uses a metaphor that fits well with Horace's imagery.

οὐ γὰρ λέοντος σκύμνον ἐν πόλει τρέφειν,  
μάλιστα μὲν λέοντα μὴ ν' πόλει τρέφειν,  
ἦν δ' ἐκτραφῇ τις, τοῖς τρόποις ὑπηρετεῖν.  
(Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, 1431a, 1431b, 1432)

'It's not good to rear a lion cub in the city. It's best to rear no lion in the city. If you do raise one to maturity, then cater to its ways.'  
(Translated by: Jeffrey Henderson)

The term 'city' in this instance denotes the ordered human community as held together by laws and rules. Clearly, for Aristophanes, this means primarily Athens. The lion, on the other hand, represents the wild, ancient force of nature, which does not acknowledge—indeed flaunts—these rules. We might try to domesticate it, to keep it in our homes as a pet, but the attempt can only meet with failure. When Horace describes his eminent personality both as one that does not tolerate the laws laid down for ordinary men, and as a representation of military excellence, the image evoked in the minds of his readers is likely that of Achilles: *The Iliad*, too, featured conflict between an exceptional hero and the general public. Indeed, it is from Achilles that the long line of superhuman figures who tear up the rules that stand in their way actually stretches.<sup>18</sup>

In *The Republic*, Plato argues that it would be unwise if future Guards were to read Homer in youth or to follow the example of Achilles, as the development and reinforcement of *thymos* will not produce a personality ideal for the role.<sup>19</sup> It is not they, after all, who will govern the ideal state, and though some form of *thymos* will be required for fighting, order and the moderation will be more important for the Guards' role in co-operating with other groups, while also respecting the laws of society. If their *thymos* were to escape the control of reason, it might run amok. The reason Plato advises against the reading of Homer as part of their training is that in addition to narrative description, the epic includes numerous passages of direct speech. A person reading (or hearing) such passages might very well imagine himself in the speaker's place, a circumstance that, in this case, might jeopardise the development of the ideal character. Accordingly, Plato evaluates the figure of Achilles himself in a decidedly negative light. 'And for the multitude, are not the main points of self-control these—to be obedient to their rulers and themselves to be rulers over

---

<sup>18</sup> This question would return again and again in the next century of the *principatus*. The handiest parallel is Seneca's *Hercules furens*. Being unable to uphold the rules, the exceptional hero simply ignores them.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding the relationship between the Platonic and Homeric heroes, I hold to the work of Angela Hobbs. (Hobbs 2006, 199–219)

the bodily appetites and pleasures of food, drink, and the rest?’ (389d–e). To this list we might add the lust for power that stands so close to the senses in Roman thought and rhetoric. In the words of Angela Hobbs: ‘Achilles is a highly inappropriate role model for the kind of stalwart civic defence-force that Socrates wants. He may be brave and skilful, and motivated by a (highly personal) notion of the *kalon*, but he can also be wild, bloodthirsty, and unruly, a supporter of the *lex talionis* and notoriously contemptuous of his commander-in-chief; as a result, he comes perilously close to undoing nine years’ hard labour on the Achaeans’ part single-handed.’<sup>20</sup>

### The second metamorphosis

At the beginning of the ode’s final structural unit, we meet with a quote from Simonides—*est et fideli tuta silentio / merces* (25 f)—*esti kai sigas akindynnon geras* (PMG 582), though Horace expands the original sentence to include the word *fidelis*, declined to match the noun *silentio* and so defining a particular quality of silence or expectancy: the type expected of the religious adherent.<sup>21</sup> The speaker undergoes an appreciable change of role in these lines. In the previous composition, the First Roman Ode, he was issuing instructions—indeed, commands—to the faithful at a sacred event as high priest of the Roman (state) religion: *favete linguis*, part of the official religious practice, spoken by a priest at the start of the ritual.<sup>22</sup> In the present ode, however, the speaker is merely one of a large group of believers (*fidelis*): it is no longer he who forbids, but he to whom the prohibition applies. At the same time, the act in which he participates is not a part of the official Roman ritual cycle, but rather a mystery. Because the speaker is likely an initiate, he cannot reveal the secrets he has learned. A prohibition of this type cannot—by definition—be spoken in relation to a state ritual. While the poet (speaker) in the first ode of the third book locates himself above the crowd he is addressing (*odi profanum vulgus et arceo I*), here, we see him as a person subordinate to power, indeed, as a simple religious adherent living in fear of punishment.<sup>23</sup> In his place, it is the statesman possessing *virtus* who ‘spurns the vulgar crowd’: ‘*coetusque volgares ... spernit*’ (23–24). In this, the fundamental thought of the previous ode is continued: everyone is subordinated to some power and all power is relative when compared to that of Jupiter (3, 1, 5–16, and the same motif in the final Roman Ode: 3, 6, 5). While

20 (Hobbs 2006, 201)

21 On this and other echoes of Simonides in the poem, see Bleisch 2001 22 ff.

22 For more on the role of silence and expectancy in religious practice, see: Köves-Zulauf.

23 In Newman’s view, it may also be that here, Horace is offering a servile repetition of the words of Augustus, who was using this line from Simonides in an everyday situation. Cf. Plutarch, *Reg. et Imp. Apophth.* 207C. (Newman 2011, 137)



the politician with *virtus* scorns both the multitudes, and the laws that apply to them, the speaker asserts that to him, and thus to one unlike the virtuous, a good end will be reached by attentive listening, by not babbling secrets, and by avoiding the company of those who do such things: by obeying the rules. However frequent a motif the fear of punishment—the experience of peril—is in the Horatian odes, it is not clear how it has made its way here. The source of threat is obviously communication, speech, that the secrets of the mystery should be revealed (*sacrum volgarit*). Thus, safety is merely the absence of communication, provided by keeping quiet (*cf. favete linguis* in the previous ode).

What, therefore, does the speaker dread? What is the object of his religious fear? What type of religious experience is being described? The answer to the first question seems apparent enough: the wording might easily have brought to the reader's mind the mysteries of Eleusis, particularly timely for their having earned an initiate in Augustus himself. In the accounts of both Cassius Dio (51, 4, 1), and Suetonius (Aug. 93), Augustus had visited Eleusis immediately following the battle of Actium and had participated there in certain ceremonies. Later, in 19 B.C.E., i.e. after the publication of the first three books of the Odes, he would visit again and would attain an even higher degree of initiation.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the evocation of the mystery may have simultaneously served as an evocation of the person of Augustus. After all, the previous two verses (the middle section of the composition), too, were also best interpreted in relation to Augustus.

It is worth noting that a mystery is precisely about the phenomenon of metamorphosis. It is a point in which one might see an emphatic connection between the motif of religious silence and that of the transformation of the previous two verses: though virtue turns the mortal immortal, to divulge the secret of the transformation is a sin. If in relation to the first metamorphosis, it was established that the appearance of the man of virtue in the political arena pushes all limits to the breaking point, then this thought might easily lead us into the world of religious constraint. According to at least one possible approach, the republican order of Rome stood under divine protection. The state's metamorphosis was a mystery commanding the same type of silence as the process by which the mortal became immortal. Thus, in this ode of Horace, the contours of not two, but three transformations begin to take shape before our readerly eyes. To this end, I will cite just a few fundamental texts on the sacred origins and divine underpinnings of the Roman republican order. In his speech *de haruspicum responsis*, [The Speech Concerning the Response of the Soothsayers] Cicero begins by informing his listeners of a strange phenomenon: a dull roar, followed by an odd chattering from below the ground in the region just outside Rome's borders. In response, the Romans pursue the interpretive

---

<sup>24</sup> For more on this and the later visit of Augustus to Eleusis, see: (Grijalvo, Copete, and Gomez 2017, 44)

method that has always worked for them: the Senate resolves that the phenomenon must be an omen (*prodigium*), a sign from the gods, and thus that the divine are trying to communicate something to the mortal world. To determine precisely what has disturbed the divine harmony (*pax deorum*) is the task of the haruspices, who must also establish what future events the gods wish to prevent by revealing themselves directly, in and/or for the benefit of the human world. Thus, the *prodigium* is a phenomenon that joins past to future. Something has occurred in the past that in fact suggests a future event. The sign itself acts so as to obstruct the process. In Cicero's account, the following events have occurred in the past: the games held at a religious festival (*ludi*) were improperly organised, a sacred place was handled as if it were profane, ambassadors who enjoyed the protection of the gods were treated inappropriately (in fact, they were murdered), and finally, the secrecy of an ancient, mystic ceremony was violated (!) and thus defiled (*de resp.* 37).<sup>25</sup> In the interpretation of the haruspices, in revealing these events violating the compact between heaven and earth, the gods wish to admonish or warn humans of impending danger. They even name these perils or, translating the Latin terminology verbatim: 'The last of them is this: *Ne rei publicae status commutetur* (60)'. 'Let the state of the republic remain unaltered.' The gods watch over the Roman republic, and should any power seek to change it, its leaders will be warned in time to protect it. Thus, the mortal has no other job but to listen, silently, to the divine exhortation. The gods are there to guard the state.

Or, to cite another situation described by Cicero: '*Quae cum ita sint... ab Iove Optimo Maximo ceterisque dis deabusque immortalibus, quorum ope et auxilio multo magis haec res publica quam ratione hominum et consilio gubernatur, pacem ac veniam peto precorque ab eis ut hodiernum diem et ad huius salutem conservandam et ad rem publicam constituendam inluxisse patiantur.* [Since this is so, I, as in duty bound where a man's life and honour and all his fortunes are at stake, first beg of most high and mighty Jupiter and all the other immortal gods and goddesses by whose help and assistance the Republic is directed rather than by the counsel and deliberation of man, to grant me their grace and favour ; and I pray that by their will this day that has dawned may see the salvation of my client and the establishment of our constitution]' (*pro Rabirio perd.* 5 Tr. H. Grose Hodge). Thus, it was not only the security, but also the status—the mode of operation—of the Roman republic that enjoyed the gods' protection. At least, it was this rhetoric that the late-republican senatorial aristocracy, into whose thoughts the writings of Cicero offer the best glimpse, liked to use. The Senate was the world's *orbis terrae santissimus ac gravis-*

---

<sup>25</sup> Here, Cicero is referencing the accusation that the old enemy of the orator-politician, Publius Clodius, took (or would have taken) part in the secret mysteries of Bona Dea, which were reserved for the eyes of women, by donning a woman's clothing.

*simus consilium*, its most holy and important body (*Cat.* I. 9), and political thought the arena in which Stoicism, the defining philosophical ideology of the age, and the traditional Roman religion were successfully wed. The Roman political order (*consulatus*) constituted the highest-ranking political structure, and as such, was part of the universal divine order, over which the celestial powers understandably stood watch. If *virtue/thymos* could interfere in *that*—the most essential point of the political order—then from the Roman perspective, religious shock (the omens of Cicero, returning in the obmutescence of the *mystēs*) seems a wholly appropriate response. The final two verses of Horace, therefore, are *only* enigmatic if we reject the possibility that the unstoppable power of the *virtus* of the previous verses is capable of altering even the republican order.

The identity of the lyric voice discussed above is further morphed in the final stanza, as in place of the initiate with his emphasis on upholding the rules, we find ourselves concluding with the image of a person utterly subordinated to power, one who, fearing punishment, seeks refuge and safety—who cannot even be sure that it will be enough if it is not he, personally, who breaks the rules. Here, mere proximity to those who have infringed upon the divine laws may suffice to incur the wrath of Jupiter. ‘*Est et fideli tuta silentio / merces* [There is also a sure reward for loyal silence]’ (25 sk.). The motif of silence, of mute expectancy, of not speaking, along with a sense of imminent peril link this ode to all that we have studied previously. In this case, too, speaking—or not speaking, the preservation of silence—are the ultimate sources of security.

## Conclusion

In the Second Roman Ode, Horace presents the metamorphosis of the *res publica* in a manner wholly unlike that seen with Augustan propaganda. Here, it is not a matter of the *princeps* restoring the Roman republic to its original condition (*res publica restituta*),<sup>26</sup> but a transformation that is terrible and mystical. Horace does not paint the process as in any way depreciative, but as the result of some kind of internal expediency; because *virtus* is its primary driver, the narrator’s stance cannot be regarded as in any way critical. The greater the *virtus* a man possesses, the weightier the consequences of this power on both his own life, and the lives of those around him. Thus, while the ode rings as a decisive challenge to certain theses of Augustan propaganda, it in fact aligns with the rejection of neither the person, nor the political actions of Augustus himself. Its final two verses can therefore easily be interpreted as a *recusatio*. The poet cannot, and does not wish to speak on a subject that exceeds his ra-

---

26 On *res publica restituta* see: Gowing 2005, 9–11.

tional comprehension, his fears in this regard taking on the countenance of a religious gesture. Notably, the ode to follow—the third in the sequence—will conclude with the following words:

*quo, Musa, tendis? desine pevicax  
referre sermones deorum et  
magna modis tenuare parvis.*

‘Where are you going, Muse? Don’t be so headstrong. Stop reporting the talk of the gods, and diminishing momentous matters with your trivial ditties.’

(*Car.* 3. 3. 70–72 Tr. N. Rudd)

## Bibliography

- Bleisch 2001 = P. R. Bleisch: Silence Is Golden: Simonides, Callimachus, and Augustan Panegyric at the Close of Horace, "Carm." 3, 2. *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 68/2, 21–40.
- Borzsák 1975 = Borzsák, I. *Horatius: Ódák és epódoszok. Auctores Latini 18*. Budapest.
- Collinge 1961 = Collinge, N. E.: *The Structure of Horace's Odes*. London.
- Connor 1972 = Connor, P. J.: The Balance Sheet: Considerations of the Second Roman Ode. *Hermes* 100/2, 241–248.
- Davis 1985 = Davis, G.: Silence and Decorum: Encomiastic Convention and the Epilogue of Horace "Carm." 3.2. *Classical Antiquity* 2/1, 9–26.
- Eisenhut, 1973 = Eisenhut, W. *Virtus Romana*. Munich.
- Gowing 2005 = Gowing, A. M.: *Empire and Memory. The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture*. Cambridge.
- Grijalvo 2017 = Grijalvo, E. M., Copete, J. M. C., and Gomez, L. (eds.): *Empire and Religion: Religious Change in Greek Cities under Roman Rule*. Leiden.
- Günther 2013 = Günther, H. Ch. (ed.) *Brill's Companion to Horace*. Leiden, Boston.
- Hobbs 2006 = Hobbs, A.: *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*. Cambridge.
- Jameson 1984 = Jameson, V. B.: Virtus Re-Formed: An »Aesthetic Response« Reading of Horace, Odes III 2. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114, 219–40.
- Krenkel 1970 = Krenkel, W. *Satiren*. Schriften und Quellen der alten Welt 23. Berlin.
- Mommsen 1905 = Mommsen, Th.: *Reden und Aufsätze von Theodor Mommsen. Mit zwei Bildnissen*. [Edited by H.O. Hirschfeld.] Berlin.
- Newman 2011 = Newman, J. K. *Horace as outsider*. Spudasmata 136. Hildesheim, New York.
- Nisbet—Rudd 2004 = Nisbet, R. G. M. — Rudd, N.: *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book III*. Oxford.
- Pasquali 1920 = Pasquali, G. = *Orazio lirico*. Firenze.
- Pöschl 1977 = Pöschl, V.: Horaz und die Politik. In: *Cusanus-Texte*. Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Heidelberg.
- Woodman 2022 = Woodman A. J.: *Horace: Odes: book III*. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Cambridge.

DOI 10.22315/ACD/2024/4

ISSN 0418-453X (print)

ISSN 2732-3390 (online)

Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0