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## Leading the Soul: Use of Rhetoric in Horace's *Odes*

### Keywords

Horace, *Odes*

Leading the Soul: Use of Rhetoric in Horace's *Odes*

Kelly Freestone

“**N** *Unc est bibendum,*” “*carpe diem,*” “*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*” Found on t-shirts and shot glasses and quoted in poetry and movies,

these phrases have become so embedded in popular culture that it is easy to forget they were first penned by a Roman poet over 2,000 years ago. The son of a freedman and a friend of Virgil, Quintus Horatius Flaccus spent his 30-year career publishing poetry under the patronage of Maecenas, an advisor of Caesar Augustus. Horace's writings include collections of Satires, Epistles, and a publicly-performed hymn commissioned by Augustus, but his most famous works, and the works from which his most quotable phrases are purloined, are his *Odes*.

A collection of 103 lyric poems divided into four books, the *Odes* are Horace's greatest technical achievement. Imitating masters of Greek lyric poetry such as Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Sappho, Horace successfully transferred the meters of Greek lyric into the Latin language. His *Odes* are commonly divided into four types—convivial, erotic, hymnal, and political—and cover a range of topics: love and wine, the Muses and the countryside, and the politics of the Augustan age, all against a backdrop of Stoic and Epicurean maxims and moralizing (Nisbet and Hubbard xv-xxii). But the technical virtuosity and philosophical foundation of the poems do not account for their enduring success. Bland next to the fiery verses of his con-

temporary Catullus and insubstantial compared to the scope of Virgil's epic masterpiece, it is not the content but the style of Horace's poetry that has ensured his immortality.

Hallmarks of Horatian style include a detached and moderate tone, the inclusion of moralizing statements or commonplaces, and frequent, unexpected transitions from topic to topic within a single ode, as well as Horace's famously pithy and prosaic diction. Many of these characteristics of the *Odes*, however, are not completely original to Horace; rather they, like his meters, trace back to Horace's Greek predecessors. Horace identifies himself with Alcaeus throughout the *Odes*, claiming to be the creator of a new Latin lyre, but his poems are perhaps most often compared to the works of Pindar, the famous composer of victory odes and the greatest lyric poet of ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup> Conte claims that Pindar shaped Horace's "pursuit of the sublime" and informed his use of serious moral gnomes or proverbs (306). Nisbet and Hubbard trace Horace's method of including "roundabout introductions...heroic speeches...portentous maxims...abrupt admonitions...wide sweep and veering transitions, [and] even...naive digressions" to comparable elements in Pindar (xiii). Similarly, they credit Horace's "structural complexity" to the influence of Pindar's lyric odes; Davis points out that the "grave charge of impulsive meandering" frequently made against Horace has also been levelled against Pindar's works (Nisbet

<sup>1</sup> While comparing himself to Alcaeus in odes 1.26 and 1.32, in 4.2 Horace acknowledges the folly and futility of attempting to imitate Pindar, writing that "anyone who strives to compete with Pindar relies on wings that have been waxed with Daedalus's skill...and is destined to give his name to a glassy sea." Horace compares Pindar to a swan who "soars in to the lofty regions of the clouds," himself to a bee, working "with incessant toil" to "fashion in a small way [his] painstaking songs"—a fitting image of the difference between the two poets' works.

and Hubbard xiii; Davis 10). Perhaps most importantly, Hubbard suggests that Pindar “set Horace a standard” of “how a poet of conscious power had been able to talk to the world” (23)—a standard Horace himself certainly achieved.

But although he was influenced by Pindar and other Greek lyricists, Horace has his own undeniably unique style. Horace is most praised not for his structure or profundity, but for his language. Unlike the works of Pindar, Horace’s Odes are not famous because they express lofty thoughts in a high style; rather, as the cultural appropriation of Horatian tag-lines suggest, Horace took common thoughts and maxims and expressed them more elegantly and memorably than any other writer before or since. Critics and commenters describe his unique “perfection” of style (Conte 311), or his exquisite “felicities of expression” (Shorey xxvii). Nietzsche, a philologist before a philosopher, writes “No other poet has given me the same artistic delight that a Horatian ode gave me from the first” (206). What accounts for this excellence of expression, this “artistic delight” that Nietzsche and others describe? Interestingly, the most commonly discussed aspect of Horace’s style is his adherence to the techniques of classical rhetoric. According to commentator Paul Shorey, “the charm, the curious felicity, of Horace results from his skillful use of rhetoric” (xxviii). Given his legacy as the consummate stylist, the use and effects of classical rhetoric in Horace’s poetry is worth examining.

The combination of rhetoric and poetry seems an odd one to the modern mind. Rhetoric, with its public, oratorical function and purpose of persuasion, seems far from the Romantic conception of poetry as the

private and introspective musings of the poet. But the distinction between the two disciplines was far from sharp in the ancient mind. Rhetoric and poetry were long considered “sister disciplines,” with significant overlap in the advice given regarding the style and technique of each (Grant and Fiske 4). Horace’s own *Ars Poetica*, considered the “most significant statement of literary criticism in Latin,” is full of “Aristotelian and Ciceronian rhetorical precepts” (Williams 382), confirming Nisbet and Hubbard’s observation that “by the Augustan period the rhetorical theorists not only drew on the poets but also influenced them” (xv).

The close connection and shared techniques between the disciplines partially results from their similar goals. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the “power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits”—that is, the study of the best means of persuasion for any given occasion (1355b). But, as Cullen argues, poetry too is “language that aims to be powerfully persuasive” through its judicious use of “abundant figures of speech” (69). The poet does not write in a vacuum, solely for his own sake; rather he, like an orator, writes to move his audience. Plato similarly claims in *Gorgias* that poetry stripped of its meter is nothing more than a type of speech spoken to an audience; therefore “poetry is a kind of public address” in which poets often “make use of rhetoric” to appeal to their hearers (502c). Whether this rhetorical appeal will be used to gratify the pleasures of an audience or to “make their souls” as “excellent as may be” by speaking the truth, Plato considers equally doubtful in the case of both poet and

orator (502c-503a).<sup>2</sup> Regardless of ultimate motives, however, “the poet and the orator, both in their subject matter and in their style, seek to make an emotional appeal to their audience” (Fiske and Grant 15). The shared goal of persuasion can explain the use of shared techniques in both disciplines.

This conception of poetry as a type of persuasion is particularly pertinent for a study of Horace’s *Odes*, for no genre is as overtly rhetorical as lyric. Defined by John Stuart Mill as “utterance overheard,” Culen describes lyric as the genre in which “the poet...turns his back on his listeners...and ‘pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else’” (73). Because of this quality, Barcheisi explains that “Lyric is the poetry that says ‘O,’ apostrophe defines lyric as a genre” (8). Horace’s *Odes* abound with such apostrophe; indeed, only 6 out of the 103 odes are not addressed to a listener in the second person (Heinze 12). This form of direct address is not unique to Horace or to ancient poetry—it is evident in lyricists from Donne to Keats to Thomas—but there are important differences in the ancient and modern use of apostrophe. In his seminal essay on Horatian lyric, Richard Heinze argues that the dialogic nature of lyric poetry is much stronger in ancient than modern lyric, and, more importantly, its purpose is different. In ancient lyric “the purpose of the address is never mere communication: the interlocutor is not meant to learn something about the poet or serve

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<sup>2</sup> Horace himself does not seem to share Plato’s qualms about the poet’s motivation to gratify his audience; even his famous stricture in the *Ars Poetica* that poetry should instruct as well as delight stems from the premise that only the poet who combines both pleases his entire audience. The old men, Horace explains, “chase from the stage what is profitless,” while the youth “disdain poems devoid of charm” (341-2). To satisfy both, the poet must “[blend] profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader” (343-4). Pleasing the audience seems to remain the primary goal for Horace.

as a vessel into which he may pour his feelings, sufferings, and joys...The poet wishes to prevail on the other's volition" (21). As opposed to later lyric poetry or other genres of Roman poetry contemporary with Horace, such as elegy, Horace's primary concern is "not to portray his own psychological state, but to affect his hearers" (24).

This partially explains Horace's emotional aloofness compared to the impassioned poetry of Catullus or Keats. But it also justifies Heinze's direct parallel between the roles of the ancient lyric poet and the orator: "He whose first task is to affect others with his song has no reason to plunge into the depths of his heart; he is rather like the orator, who would also sweep away, convince, inflame" (25). In other words, Horace the poet is in fact acting as an orator to his audience. His *Odes* resemble miniature rhetorical speeches. Whether he is praying to the gods to bless his musical endeavors or thanking them for saving his life, urging the Romans to rejoice in the downfall of Cleopatra or bemoaning the moral corruption of Rome, beseeching a friend to "drown life's sadness and trouble with mellow wine" (1.8) or to "avoid asking what will happen tomorrow" (1.10), Horace is overtly seeking to persuade his listener.

Of course, this rhetorical appeal is working on multiple levels: as Horace presents the fiction of persuading his ostensible listeners, so he seeks to persuade his actual reader of the same point. In his illuminating book *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse*, Davis argues that each ode has an "intrinsic rhetorical goal": Horace wishes to convince the "reader to accept a particular way of looking at the world" (3). In order to do so, the "composer of the *Odes* is primarily engaged...in conveying

ideas and philosophical insights in a manner that is rhetorically persuasive” (2). Because of the nature of lyric poetry as the genre of direct address, and because of Horace’s more subtle goal of convincing his reader, the *Odes* are more rhetorical in purpose and form than the modern reader might expect. Given this rhetorical nature, it is not surprising that all the elements of classical rhetoric are evident in the *Odes*. Horace’s use of the three appeals of invention, his choice of arrangement, and the figures of speech that characterize his style all serve to make his poetry persuasive for both the imagined interlocutor and for the reader. An examination of Horace’s incorporation of these rhetorical principles in his *Odes* shows how the techniques of poetry and rhetoric overlap and why the use of such techniques has made Horace’s poetry so effective.

Invention is the first canon of rhetoric, and all three of the appeals enumerated by Aristotle—logos, pathos, and ethos—are evident in Horace’s *Odes*. Margaret Hubbard’s description of the “formal and argumentative nature” of some verses in the *Odes* suggests Horace’s use of the appeal to logos (3); Nisbet and Hubbard further observe that some arguments are even “set in syllogist form, sometimes with suppressed premisses” (xxv). The statements of Epicurean moralising in particular are frequently expressed as enthymemes: Keep a level head and restrain from excessive joy, for you are sure to die (Horace *Odes* 2.3). Enjoy what you have while you can, for eventually you will die and all you possess will be given to your heirs (2.15). Cut short long-term hopes, and harvest the day, for soon we will die (1.11). The truth of stated premise—the inevitability of death—is undeniable, adding to the strength of his conclusion. Horace’s frequent use of mytho-

logical examples also constitutes an appeal to logos, but by induction rather than by deduction, as per Aristotle's division of methods of proof in his *Art of Rhetoric*. When Horace tells Xanthias not to be ashamed of loving a slave woman, he initially backs up his exhortation not with logical arguments but with the examples of Achilles and Ajax, both heroes of the Trojan war who also fell in love with slave women: "In earlier days the slave girl Briseis with her snow-white skin roused the haughty Achilles; the beauty of the captive Tecmessa roused Ajax...though he was her master" (2.4). In 2.9 Horace uses examples from both nature and mythology to convince his friend Valgius to cease mourning for his lost love, writing that even Nestor "did not spend all his years grieving for his dear Antilochus, nor did his Phrygian parents and sisters mourn young Troilus forever." Such examples are meant to be inductively persuasive, convincing Horace's reader to accept the rationality of his advice.

In other situations, examples from mythology may also be considered an appeal to pathos, as such examples provide not only logical inference but also serve as a clue to what emotional reaction the reader is supposed to have. The names of Daedalus, Achilles, or Penelope invoke the skill, ferocity, or faithfulness of each character, and also recall their full stories to the reader's mind; such mentions of well-known characters, or famous mythological events such as the gigantomachy or the Trojan war, thus carry layers of connotation that lie behind the point Horace is trying to make. But Horace utilizes more obvious appeals to pathos as well. Ode 3.10 is an amusing, hyperbolic example in which the poet pleads with a woman (whom, he insists, was not meant to "be a Penelope, spurning all her suitors") to accept

his advances by presenting a pitiful picture of himself stretched out on her doorstep in the cold: “You would still have too much pity to expose me... to the North winds...do you not hear not how the door rattles, how the trees...howl in the gale, while Jupiter is freezing the fallen snow?” In I.14, the urgency of Horace’s wording (“O ship! New waves are about to carry you out to sea. O, what are you *doing*? One final effort now, and make port before it is too late!”) constitutes a pathetic appeal for his reader to feel the same urgency.

Perhaps the most interesting use of appeals in the *Odes*, however, is the appeal to ethos. For an orator, the appeal to ethos is the speaker’s appeal to his own legitimacy: in order for anything he says to be taken seriously, he must demonstrate that he is wise and virtuous—that he knows what he is talking about and is worthy of being trusted. One way that Horace establishes his ethos is by inserting poetic passages where he proves his poetic inspiration and capability (see, for example, 2.19 and 2.20). But the question of ethos is different for a poet than an orator, for Horace must primarily convince his reader not of his own character but of that of his persona. Davis explains that “Lyric arguments are communicated, however obliquely, by “fictional delegates...whose ideas and attitudes may or may not coincide with those of the actual historical personage” (5). That is, although the poet has a distinct “tone of voice” (Nisbet & Hubbard xxv) and an “identifiable “character”” or ethos in the *Odes* (Davis 5), this character is to some extent assumed in order to promote the point. As Nisbet and Hubbard observe, this is one reason it has proven difficult to use his poetry to construe a biography of the poet: as Horace’s tone shifts from the acerbic writer of the *Sat-*

*ires* to the gentle philosopher of the *Odes*, the picture of the actual historical person remains fuzzy (xxv-xvi).

Even within the *Odes* this manipulation of ethos is evident. Tarrant suggests that Horace alters the structure and syntax of his language to reflect his character in the narrative. Thus the logical incoherence of 1.22, in which Horace introduces the noble principle that a life of integrity protects a man, only to conclude that he himself was protected in his encounter with a wolf because of his love for Lalage, reflects the incoherence of the supposedly infatuated poet, while the elegant, artificial dialogue structure of 3.9 reveals the characters of those speaking (Tarrant 37). Similarly, Horace's exclamations and repetitions in 2.19 mimic the frantic nature of a Bacchic revel; twice Horace repeats the cry of the followers of Bacchus ("euho!"), twice he pleads for mercy, twice he insists that it is permitted for him to sing of Bacchus. The frantic tone continues through the four repetitions of "you" in quick succession through the middle of the poem: "you bend rivers... [you bend] the savage sea, you bind the Bistonian's woman's hair...you...hurled back Rhoetus." The calmer syntax in the concluding two stanzas, and their depiction of Bacchus's departure from a meek and subdued Cerberus, implies the withdrawal of Bacchus from the breast of the similarly subdued poet. By varying his arrangement and style, Horace thus promulgates the ethos that suits the proposition or argument of the particular ode. Indeed, throughout the *Odes* Horace seems to be "an actor wearing different masks" (Nisbet & Hubbard xxvi), appearing in some odes as the grand visionary or ardent patriot, in others as the petty lover or unconcerned philosopher enjoying his country farm. Ultimately, Horace proves as adept at trying on

different characters as different meters.

While Horace's employment of the rhetorician's three appeals of invention is fairly straight-forward, his use of the second canon of rhetoric, arrangement, is less clear. Far from classical rhetoric's organization of a speech into five sections, the Horatian odes have frequently been criticized for their lack of direction, accused of "meandering" (Davis 10) or completely lacking "anything like a connected train of thought" (Tarrant 38). While syllogistic arguments may be detected within an ode, implied arguments are harder to discern. An ode frequently seems to begin in one place and end somewhere completely different. 2.13, for example, begins with Horace cursing a tree and ends with a vivid vision of an underworld; 1.7 jumps from Horace's praise of the Tibur to the poet's advice to his friend, only to conclude with a retelling of Teucer's speech to his co-exiles. While there is an inferential connection between the earlier statements in the ode and the image Horace leaves the reader with, there is no circling back to make the connection explicit.

Nevertheless, various structures within the odes have been discerned. Nisbet and Hubbard demonstrate that some odes have a 2 + 2 + 3 structure, in which the first four stanzas narrate certain events or actions and the final three detail the consequences (Tarrant 25).<sup>3</sup> Tarrant notes the frequent use of a *da capo* ABA structure, in which the final section recalls the language, theme, or both of the opening section; thus in 1.9 the seem-

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ode 2.7. The history of Horace and his friend and addressee, Pompeius, is described in the first four stanzas, while the fifth stanza's introductory "ergo" marks the switch to the only logical conclusion of such a history—a feast and drinking party in celebration of Pompeius's return (Tarrant 38 ff.).

ingly disparate opening and closing sections are united under their common advice to make the most of the season, be that the season of winter or the season of one's youth (42). The ode is also almost chiasmic in structure: a picture of winter ("Do you see how Soracte stands there shining with its blanket of deep snow...?") is followed by the injunction to pile up the logs on the fire, then the injunction to take each day as it comes and enjoy one's youth is followed by a picture of what such enjoyment looks like ("Now is the time to make for the Park and the city squares...when dusk is falling, and delightful laughter comes from a secluded corner"). The effect is musical and symmetrical, but it is also rhetorical: the reader moves from image to image to the intended conclusion.

Davis explains that this subtle movement exemplifies how Horace's arguments progress: "Horatian lyric discourse typically 'argues' a coherent nexus of ideas through nuanced variations in form and presentation. The building-blocks of these arguments consist of motifs, *topoi*, recurrent metaphors, and rhetorical conventions that, for the most part, are set forth paratactically" (3). This highlights one of the biggest differences between the use of arrangement in oratory and its use in poetry. Whereas the orator systematically lays out his case, structuring his argument so that his evidence will clearly lead to his conclusion, the poet arranges his images and allusions so they more obliquely suggest his conclusion, with the intervening logical steps left to be inferred by the reader.

Davis demonstrates how the three seemingly disconnected sections of Ode 1.7—Horace's praise of the poetic possibilities of Tibur, his advice to Plancus, and his narration of Teucer's speech—all support the ode's central

argument: an acceptance of the natural ups and downs of life will allow one to live contentedly, regardless of his current situation (197). As Davis explains, Horace's opening rejection of poets who write "long continuous [*perpetuo*]" poems overlaps with the second section's rejection of those who refuse to accept the changeability of nature and persist in believing that the sky will "invariably [*perpetuo*] produce rain" (Davis 197-198; Horace *Odes* 2.13). Contrary to this belief, Horace urges Plancus to philosophically accept his circumstances and console himself with wine. Of course, as it encourages Plancus to develop a certain inner attitude towards life, Horace's advice transcends all circumstances; hence in the final section even Teucer, exiled from his beloved homeland, can encourage his men not to despair and to "banish [their] worries" with wine (Davis 199; Horace *Odes* 2.13). Teucer and his story thus becomes a "concrete" example of Horace's philosophical advice expressed in the centre of the poem and introduced in his opening poetical critique (Davis 198). As this example shows, Horace's use of arrangement in his *Odes* is just as intentional as that of the orator, but it is much more subtle.

Finally, Horace is famous for his mastery of the third canon of rhetoric—style. As the supreme stylist of the Latin language, Horace's success has long been tied to his use of rhetorical figures of speech. His *Odes* are full of the apostrophe, imperatives, rhetorical questions, and personification typical of lyric poetry. Horace's address in the opening of the allegorical "ship of state" ode incorporates three of the above figures: "O ship!...O, what are you *doing?*" (1.14). But Horace also makes ample use of other tropes and schemes. Metaphor and simile, synecdoche and metonymy all

contribute to the creation of his lovely images; anadiplosis and anaphora lend dramatic emphasis, such as in 3.5 (*derepta vidi; vidi ego* — “I have seen [arms] snatched [from Roman soldiers]; I myself have seen [the arms of citizens]...”) and in 2.16 with the triple repetition of *otium* (“a quiet life is what a [sailor caught in a storm] prays...is the prayer of the Thrace...is the prayer of the Medes”). Asyndeton and polysyndeton steer the direction of the poems by connecting Horace’s images and thoughts, while irony, oxymoron, and litotes contribute to his pervasive tone of “dry humour” (Nisbet & Hubbard xxv). Latin’s inflected endings also allow for additional poetic effect and rhetorical emphasis by means of “symmetry, parallelism, [and] antithesis,” as Shorey explains (xxix).

But Horace’s style is as notable for what it leaves out as for what it includes. Nisbet and Hubbard describe his diction as comparatively dry, his poetry marked by “realism,” a “down-to-earth” style, and fewer dramatic poetical flourishes than contemporary poets (xxii). Horace’s vocabulary is sparse, his choice of words prosaic, his word-order straightforward, and his use of alliteration or onomatopoeia minimal (Nisbet and Hubbard xxii). Yet the felicity of language which he attains within his economy of expression is unparalleled in Latin verse. Shorey attributes this to Horace’s skill in joining ordinary words together to form an extraordinary expression (xxvii). In the *Ars Poetica* Horace tells the aspiring poet: “With a nice taste and care in weaving words together, you will express yourself most happily, if a skillful setting makes a familiar word new” (46). Horace is the master of crafting such skillful settings, as his many well-known phrases attest.

His simplicity of style and the success of his combinations also

demonstrate Horace's adherence to the principle of decorum. This concept that the subject matter must be suited to the artist's talent, that the form must be suited to the genre, and that the words must be suited to the thought (i.e., that the artist's manner must be suited to his matter) is praised both in the rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Aristotle and in Horace's own *Ars Poetica* (Grant & Fiske 14-15). From his judicious variation of tone based on his subject matter, to his deliberate employment of rhetorical figures of speech, to his decision of what word to put where, the success of Horace's phrases ultimately displays his understanding of what is fitting. Nietzsche describes the result:

"In certain languages that which Horace has achieved could not even be attempted. This mosaic of words, in which every word—as sound, as place, as concept—pours out its strength right and left and over the whole, this minimum in the extent and number of the signs, and the maximum thereby attained in the energy of the signs—all that is Roman and...noble par excellence. All the rest of poetry becomes, in contrast, something too popular—mere sentimental blather (206)."

While Horace instructs his reader through his use of logic and guides the reader with his arrangement, it is ultimately Horace's skillful placement of words that weaves each of his odes into a cohesive whole.

What is the overall effect of Horace's use of rhetoric's appeals, arrangement, and style? Davis claims that all these rhetorical elements of the

Horatian ode work together to make Horace's case, to persuade the reader "to accept a particular way of looking at the world" (3). But Horace's way of doing this is perhaps more subtle than the rhetorical connotations of the term "persuasion" suggest. According to Horace, the aim of poetry is not to change the hearer's mind but to "lead the hearer's soul" (*Ars Poetica* 100). As he crafts his ethos, obliquely suggests the connection between his thoughts, and startles or charms the reader with his apt "mosaic" of words, Horace is not so much forcing the mind of his reader to intellectually accept his position as he is "enchanting the soul" (Plato, *Phaedrus*). Perhaps the most fascinating insight to be gained from the study of rhetoric in Horace's *Odes* is that rhetorical figures are a crucial part of the enchanting effects of both the orator and the poet. However mechanistic or formulaic they may seem, rhetorical techniques do not only convince the intellect; they are also the means by which souls are led.

It seems a modern trend to wish to find meaning or profundity in the original or the formless. But the dependence of orators and poets throughout history on strict forms and figures suggests otherwise. Besides acting as persuasive conveyors of meaning, perhaps poetical or rhetorical rules also foster the invention and arrangement of ideas and feelings. Perhaps the existence of such rules does not stifle creativity, but rather encourages it. Perhaps form does not hinder the discovery of meaning, but allows for it. Perhaps profundity was only ever to be found within the boundaries of forms, and perhaps this pursuit of meaning and profundity is what an adherence to classical rhetoric frees the poet to do.

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