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A Study on Humor in Books I, II, and III of Horace's *Odes*

Horace was born in 65 BCE on a small farm in the rural south of Italy. Midway through his childhood, his father, a freedman, sent him off to Rome to further pursue his studies, and he ultimately finished his education in Athens. Horace then served in the army before obtaining the post of an assistant treasury official back in Rome. It is around this time that Horace began to write poetry, and shortly thereafter, he became acquainted with Gaius Maecenas, a patron of the arts and Octavian's ally, who would soon become Horace's friend and patron.¹ Under Maecenas's wing, Horace gained access to the elite political circles in Rome and eventually came into contact with the Emperor, Augustus, himself.

As a result of his varied experiences early in life, Horace's poetry covers a wide variety of subjects: Amongst others, love, relationships, friends, politics, the countryside, the symposium, and even poetry itself all feature as topics of poems. Additionally, due in part to his Greek education, Horace employs a broad selection of different lyric styles and meters: He notably uses nine different meters in the first nine poems of the *Odes* and as many as twelve throughout the work.² However, the *Odes* were not Horace's first poetic composition. While working as a treasury clerk in 35, Horace published his first book of *Satires*.³ He then published the *Epodes* in 30 and the first three Books of the *Odes* in 23, followed by the *Carmen Saeculare* in celebration of the Secular Games held in 17 and the *Ars Poetica* around 9.⁴ Nonetheless, the *Odes* have arguably been his most influential work.

And, though Horace covers a considerable range of topics in his poems, there exist broad themes that unite poems within and between works. For example, the theme of humor is latent in many of the *Odes* despite the fact that it is not the central theme in most poems. It has not been written about extensively for this reason, and thus, a more thorough analysis of its usage within the *Odes* is a worthwhile undertaking. Additionally, because of Horace's selective usage of humor in the *Odes*, the instances in which it does appear can be analyzed for similarities to form a more complete understanding of the theme's importance within the work.

For the purpose of this thesis, I define humor as a presentation in the form of words or actions with the intent to elicit a smile or laughter from an audience of viewers, listeners, or readers. However, since humor can also be used to elicit feelings of discomfort, it need not always be happy or light-hearted. In addition, humor can range from being simple and superficial to being sophisticated and thought provoking. For example, knock-knock jokes tend to be lighthearted whereas satire generally causes an audience to think more deeply about the material being presented. Additionally, a single instance of humor can apply at different levels to

¹ West (2002) ix.

² Santirocco 19.

³ West (2002) ix.

⁴ Nisbet (2007) 7-21.

different people in an audience: An easily understood joke may seem superficially light-hearted to some but can also contain more profound undertones that only keener audience members understand. Humor is also often the result of an incongruity in an otherwise serious context, and events are humorous when they are out of place or incompatible with the circumstances in which they arise. For example, the usage or placement of unusual actions or phrases within a work contrary to those that are expected within the stylistic, circumstantial, or theoretical boundaries of that work may be found humorous.

In the context of the *Odes*, I argue that humor occurs when the author, Horace, inserts a surprising twist into a familiar scene, one the audience understands and about which it already has preconceptions. This added twist is unexpected and is, in itself, amusing and may imply a comment on the scenario being depicted. Often, the twist manifests itself as an incongruity, but it can also appear in other forms, such as dramatic metaphor and epic parody, as well. The humor stems from the fact that the audience already has a preexisting idea of the sorts of events and actions that are compatible with those on display in a given situation. More specifically, the inclusion of Horace's surprising twist causes the audience to recognize the disparity between their preconceived ideas and those being presented, and the audience finds the contrast between the two humorous as a result.

For instance, consider the ways in which the following example illustrates the aforementioned characteristics of humor:

A: Knock-knock!

B: Who's there?

A: Opportunity.

B: Don't be silly, opportunity doesn't knock twice!

Even this simple joke captures humor's development in a scene. The setting is familiar since many have heard knock-knock jokes before. We generally understand their format and consider them to be superficially humorous. With this in mind, an audience might therefore find the reply of person B—the twist—surprising since we would generally expect the standard response "Opportunity who?" in jokes of this form. The joke also contains another level of humor in the punch line that alludes to the adage "Opportunity only knocks once," which many have heard and would recognize. However, few would expect to find it referenced in a knock-knock joke. Additionally, though social commentary is normally beyond the scope of knock-knock jokes, one might liken the brevity of this joke to the brevity of opportunity in all of our endeavors or even the fact that it is a frequent occurrence that we often expect one thing, such as a five-line knock-knock joke, and receive another. Together, these facets of the joke present a situation that the audience recognizes as being atypical of knock-knock jokes, and as a result, we can appreciate the humor in its contrast.

A similar analysis of humor can be applied more broadly as well. For example, and as an introduction to Horatian humor in the *Odes*, consider the scenario presented in 3.10:

Extremum Tanain si biberes, Lyce,
 saevo nupta viro, me tamen asperas
 porrectum ante foris obicere incolis
 plorares Aquilonibus.
 5 audis quo strepitu ianua, quo nemus
 inter pulchra satum tecta remugiat
 ventis, et positas ut glaciet nives
 puro numine Iuppiter?
 ingratham Veneri pone superbiam,
 10 ne currente retro funis eat rota.
 non te Penelopen difficilem procis
 Tyrrhenus genuit parens.
 o quamvis neque te munera nec preces
 nec tinctus viola pallor amantium
 15 nec vir Pieria paelice saucius
 curvat, supplicibus tuis
 parcas, nec rigida mollior aesculo
 nec Mauris animum mitior anguibus.
 non hoc semper erit liminis aut aquae
 20 caelestis patiens latus.

[tr. Niall Rudd]

Even if you drank the faraway Don, Lyce, and
 were married to a savage husband, you would
 still have too much pity to expose me, lying
 prostrate at your cruel doorway, to the North
 Winds of your fellow countrymen. Do you not
 hear how the door rattles, how the trees that
 grow in your handsome courtyard howl in the
 gale, while Jupiter is freezing the fallen snow with
 his cloudless power?

No more of your haughtiness (Venus doesn't
 like it); otherwise the rope may run back as the
 wheel spins. Your Etruscan father did not beget
 you to be a Penelope, spurning all her suitors.
 Though you remain unbending in spite of your
 lovers' gifts, their appeals, their pallor tinged with
 yellow, and in spite of the fact that your husband
 is smitten by a Pierian mistress, yet at least please
 spare those who beg for mercy ... You are no
 more pliant than the rigid oak, no more soft-
 hearted than Moorish snakes. This body of mine
 will not endure for ever your doorstep and the
 rain from heaven!

Horace presents a scene most of us can imagine: There is a young man on the
 doorstep of a girl he adores, and he is trying to profess his love to her so that she
 will let him inside. Our preconceptions about this scenario, reminiscent of a famous
 scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, lead us to expect the man to lament his lovesickness or
 the girl's reluctance to reciprocate his affection, after which she will dramatically
 appear and let him in. But we have an entirely different scenario here: The man
 proceeds to make a series of arguments about why the girl should let him in, and she
 never actually appears in the poem. Horace's picture of love is a bleak one since the
 lover's appeals fall vainly on deaf, or altogether absent, ears. But the young man is
 not deterred by the fact that he is speaking to no one. When he asks (*audis*, 5)
 whether any reasonable woman could possibly leave him outside in spite of the
 weather, the audience finds humor in the fact that he receives no answer and
 instead continues speaking unanswered. He proceeds to invoke lofty images of
 mundane weather phenomena (*nemus... remugiat / ventis; glaciet nives / puro*
numine Iuppiter, 5-8) but then, in the next line, hypocritically transfers his own
 haughtiness to the girl by proclaiming that her loftiness is displeasing to the goddess
 of love, Venus (*ingratam Veneri pone superbiam*, 9) when it is his own haughtiness
 that is out of place here. This scene contains two levels of humor for the audience to
 appreciate: First, there is the paradoxical contrast between the speaker's juxtaposed
 lines, and second, the fact that the speaker himself is the one acting haughtily—and
 thus does not receive any attention from his love interest—makes his words ironic.

However, when this argument is unsuccessful, the man simply tries others: He attacks the girl's upbringing, stating that her father was Etruscan and therefore could not have raised a woman as virtuous as Penelope (*non te Penelopen difficilem procis / Tyrrhenus genuit parens*, 11-12), and he does so again in high language, as *Tyrrhenus* is a Greek term. Instead, because of the licentiousness associated with Etruscans,⁵ the man insults the woman he is serenading by associating her with the supposed immorality of her father and distancing her from the mythological figure Penelope; his reasoning is that she has no reason to be acting as if she is morally superior since she is anything but. This is no way to win a woman's heart, and surely the audience would appreciate the humor in his doomed attempts to gain the woman's affection with such an inharmonious attempt at flattery.

Also in this vein are the man's two other geographical allusions. The first (*extremum . . . Aquilonibus*, 1-4) refers to the Roman preconception that those living on the edges of the world were particularly uncultivated.⁶ The man's argument here is that even a barbarian woman would have the decency to invite him inside, and, since she is not such a coarse woman, she should behave more kindly towards him. Of course, there is another, more humorous interpretation of his words, that she is particularly barbaric since she has not let him in, that the audience would certainly recognize and appreciate for its dual nature. The second allusion (*nec rigida mollior aesculo / nec Mauris animum mitior anguibus*, 17-18) is again in grand diction and further insults the woman by comparing her unwillingness to receive him to that of an unbending tree and her kindness to that of snakes. Additionally, by including these far-flung references in his arguments, the man makes himself seem impressive in the sense that he may be highly knowledgeable or at least well travelled. However, the setting of the poem is decidedly Roman, and it is far more likely that the man is behaving melodramatically. Also, if he were truly as grand as his language, the audience would expect him to have more success in winning over women, something he ultimately fails to do; this unexpected failure is the poem's twist since it disrupts the audience's expectations throughout the poem. Horace's commentary here revolves around the absurdity and futility of young men's habit of superficially puffing themselves up in an effort to gain the affection of women. In sum, the disproportionately grandiose and melodramatic language and images the man evokes are incongruous with the situation at hand, one in which an ordinary man is trying to woo an ordinary woman; this grandiosity is further completely undercut by its failure to have any effect on the women.

Lastly, the man appeals to the idea that women were not made to be without suitors, and therefore, he should be allowed to pursue her. Unsurprisingly, this does not convince the absent woman, so the lover directs his efforts towards her husband, who he asserts is engaged in an affair with another woman (*nec vir Pieria paelice saucius / curvat*, 15-16). This is humorous since the young man is the one seeking the affair with a married woman, not the other way around. Also, though he suggests that she should take pity on her suitors (*supplicibus tuis / parcas*, 16-17) to resolve the situation, two unfaithful relationships do not cancel each other out from

⁵ Nisbet and Rudd 146.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

a moral point of view. The fact that *supplicibus tuis* is plural suggests that other men have sought the woman and been turned away, adding potency to his final argument that he, and presumably all other men, will not wait on her doorstep forever unless she yields to his advances. So if she ever wants to be loved again, she ought to let him be the one to do it. Thus, with love making him desperate, the man gives up his unconvincing arguments, and the poem ends with no resolution; it would not be unreasonable for the audience to picture the man still standing on the woman's doorstep, just as he said suitors would not continue to do. This stark conclusion draws the audience's attention back to the contrast between the outcome they expected at the beginning of the poem and the man's humorously poor attempts to obtain that outcome. Horace's commentary here is simple: Love makes us desperate, causes us to inflate our self-confidence, and causes us to exaggerate our behaviors. As such, it can make us act like fools in situations where our affections go unreciprocated and demonstrates that sometimes, and despite our best efforts, love may simply be out of reach.

With this analysis complete, we are able to find humor in the scene as a result of the audience's preconceptions and the unexpected twist, and Horace's accompanying commentary gives purpose to humor's inclusion in the scene. However, as previously mentioned, humor's significance in the *Odes* is related to its importance within single poems as well as to the connections it enables the audience to make between poems in the larger work. Thus, to be complete, our analysis merits a fuller exploration of the role humor plays in other love poems. Additionally, humor's significance changes in relation to the types of poems it appears in, which is to say that humor in love poems differs from humor in poems about the symposium or poems about poetry, and so poems of all three varieties will be studied herein to capture more of the breadth of Horatian humor. Finally, because Horace uses humor to elicit a human response, this study will focus on the effects humor has on humans. In the love poems, Horace's humor is mainly focused on the roles people play in relationships, whereas the human responses to humor in the convivial poems and poems about poetry have to do with the significance of drinking and self-perception respectively.

Female figures appear often and for a wide variety of reasons in the *Odes*: There are muses and goddesses, historical and political figures, and, most commonly, women and maidens in love poem;⁷ of the erotic poems that make up over a quarter of the *Odes*, the vast majority involve women in some capacity.⁸ As a result, it is unsurprising that Horace has comments to make about women's roles in romantic relationship, especially since it is a topic that has been a contentious for centuries. For Romans, women were considered to belong to men. The most common form of marriage was *sine manu*, and it entailed remaining under the father's authority instead coming under a husband's; other times, the woman was transferred directly to the husband, and to do anything else would have been frowned upon. One way or another, women were under male legal control. They

⁷ Ancona 174.

⁸ Ibid., 186-191.

generally did not have any bearing in social or political matters and would have been out of place in trying to speak up for themselves. Thus the woman in *Odes* 3.9 is atypical because she is a particularly strong figure:

—Donec gratus eram tibi
nec quisquam potior bracchia candidae
cervici iuvenis dabat,
Persarum vigui rege beator.
5 —“donec non alia magis
arsisti neque erat Lydia post Chloen,
multi Lydia nominis
Romana vigui clarior Ilia.”
—me nunc Thressa Chloe regit,
10 dulcis docta modos et citharae sciens,
pro qua non metuam mori,
si parcent animae fata superstiti.
—“me torret face mutua
Thurini Calais filius Ornyti,
15 pro quo bis patiar mori,
si parcent puero fata superstiti.”
—quid si prisca redit Venus
diductosque iugo cogit aeneo,
si flava excutitur Chloe
20 reiectaeque patet ianua Lydiae?
—“quamquam sidere pulchrior
ille est, tu levior cortice et improbo
iracundior Hadria,
tecum vivere amem, tecum obeam libens.”

[tr. Niall Rudd]

As long as I was dear to you, and no favored
rival put his arms around your white neck, I
lived a richer life than the king of Persia.
“As long as you had no other flame, and Lydia
did not take second place to Chloe, I, Lydia, was
a great celebrity and lived a more famous life
than Rome’s Ilia.”
Thracian Chloe now rules me; she can sing
sweet songs and play the lyre delightfully. I
shan’t be afraid to die for her, if the fates spare
my darling and let her live.
“Calais, the son of Ornytus from Thurii, kindles
in me the flame that he feels himself. I’m
prepared to die for him twice over, if the fates
spare the boy and let him live.”
What if Venus returns as she was before, and
forces under her brazen yoke those who have
been driven apart? What if flaxen-haired Chloe
is got rid of, and the door stands open for the
jilted Lydia?
“Although he is more beautiful than a star, while
you are more lightweight than a cork, and more
bad-tempered than the unconscionable Adriatic,
I would love to live with you, and with you I
would gladly die.

Horace begins the poem by describing two lovers in a middle of a fight as they repeatedly try to one-up each other. Since most people have been in a relationship, and nearly all relationships have periods of tension, this is a familiar scene for most of his audience. However, what follows is highly unexpected. As the boyfriend begins to suggest that his girlfriend, Lydia, no longer loves him, she retorts that she is better in several ways than his new girlfriend. This statement alone is surprising for several reasons: The emphasis on the woman’s side of dialogue is atypical for Roman times, and the fact that her argument is better than his is doubly surprising. She systematically counters each of his points with her own, as emphasized by *donec* in both of their first lines (1; 5) and parallel forms of *vigeo* and comparative adjectives in their fourth lines (4; 8). This careful diction highlights for the reader that Lydia is winning the argument since she is instantly able to reshape her boyfriend’s words and meter to fit her feelings while in the middle of an argument. It is typical for the second speaker in an amoebean contest

such as this to put forth the superior argument,⁹ so the fact that Horace unexpectedly puts Lydia in this position of power further emphasizes the idea that she has outdone her boyfriend here. Additionally, the *donec* that begins each of their first lines implies that their love was a past feeling and that they are now no longer in love. However, as the poem progresses, their arguments take on such a similar form that the audience cannot help but think the two ex-lovers still harbor feelings for each other. Some of this is due to Lydia's countering of her boyfriend's argument, but not all feelings between the two have disappeared.

Horace continues to highlight Lydia's exceptional behavior as her refutation of her boyfriend's arguments persists into the next section of the poem. The reader might find this surprising: In what world does a woman *keep* outperforming a man in an argument? But sure enough, as the boyfriend professes his love and willingness to die for his new girlfriend, Chloe (*pro qua non metuam mori*, 11), Lydia counters again by saying that she loves *her* new boyfriend, who is socially superior to Chloe, even *more* and that she would die for him *twice* (*pro quo bis patiar mori*, 15). But Lydia overdoes her comeback by hyperbolically inflating her description of her boyfriend (*Thurini Calais filius Ornyti*, 14): Calais's most impressive attribute seems to be that he is the son of someone famous, where Chloe at least has some talents of her own (*dulcis docta modos et citharae sciens*, 10). Nonetheless, this inflation serves to highlight Lydia's dominant role in their relationship: She has gotten herself a new boyfriend after her boyfriend got himself a new girlfriend, and she can brag about him as well as anyone. But again, the audience may wonder at her actions. It is unclear as to whether she is being bold by doing as her boyfriend does, or whether she is secretly lovesick and mirroring his actions to remind herself of him.

At this point, the audience likely anticipates that a third, crescendoing pair of stanzas will follow the second, perhaps one in which Lydia totally refutes her boyfriend's argument or on in which he turns the tables on her and suddenly wins the disagreement. But the audience gets a twist instead as the boyfriend's argument utterly breaks down; he begins asking questions instead of making firm statements (*quid si*, 17; *si*, 19). And, instead of pointing out Lydia's impudence, he submits to her and offers to take her back. In order to do this, he must first push away his current girlfriend (*si flava excutitur Chloe reiectaeque patet ianua Lydiae?*, 20), thereby invalidating his earlier statement that it was she who ruled him and commanded his affections (*me nunc Thraessa Chloe regit*, 9). Even more unexpected is the fact that Lydia opts to return to him after a long and heated argument. However, she makes no mention of leaving her new boyfriend—perhaps he never existed at all, which would undermine her earlier comments—which supports the idea she was in love with her old boyfriend all along. Both lovers said that they would die if the Fates spared the lives of their beloveds (*si parcent animae fata superstiti*, 12; *si parcent puero fata superstiti*, 16), but the only people left at the end of the poem are the original boyfriend and girlfriend. Thus it may never have been the case that they were prepared to die for their *new* partners and that their affections were always for their original partners. To this end, Lydia refutes her earlier claim that she would

⁹ Nisbet and Rudd 133.

happily die twice for another man by concluding that she would prefer life and death with her old boyfriend; *bis* (15) is rounded out by the double *tecum* (24), and *obeam libens* (24) overturns *metuam mori* (11) and *patiar mori* (15) earlier on. Thus the buildup to this climax, in which the two try again to outdo each other, concludes in the exact opposite situation. If anything, the lovers ultimately undo each other in their sudden reconciliation, as their fierce and now suddenly forgotten argument crumbles away.

By now, it is not at all clear to the audience as to what happened to the argument or why Lydia, who was extraordinary in the first four stanzas, suddenly changed her approach; no quarrel results in happiness for everyone, and few resolutions come about through a heated argument and an out of place offer for peace. Social questions abound, and the commentary in the poem quickly becomes evident: Horace's depiction of lovers' roles in a relationship is quite pointed but is delivered with a light and humorous touch. Horace's portrayal of lovers shows people to be fickle, emotional, and inconsistent, and the poem also suggests that love can effect change in people. Lydia may have never been aggressive or persuasive, but love was driving her to act beyond the bounds of a typical woman's role. Lydia's discourse may have instilled in the minds of the audience the idea that all women are able to effectively tame and counter men but simply cannot voice their side of things due to social norms. Though probably not suggesting that women ought to be listened to more in society, it is not unreasonable to think Horace was taking a dig at the one-sided nature of Roman love here. And certainly to modern eyes, there is no good reason that men should have the only say in their relationships. Additionally, there also exists the idea that being able to have a constructive and reconciliatory argument is an essential aspect of a relationship, and the fact that we fight and reconcile makes our loving relationships that much stronger.

Finally, there are dramatic embellishments throughout the poem—such as mentions of Persian kings (4), Ilia (8), godly relations (13), godly intervention (17), and celestial comparison (21)—that fall away into mundane comparisons, such as likening the boyfriend to the surly sea (*tu levior cortice et improbo iracundior Hadria*, 23). However, by the time the lovers' resolution is reached, it seems that there is solace in simplicity; the implication is that all that is needed for a strong relationship is a loving partner, and everything else is superfluous. As a result, the humor here lies in the differences between the audience's expectation of a fight playing out and the events of the poem: The role reversal between Lydia and her boyfriend and the resolution of events in the final two stanzas depict love as a confusing but ultimately uniting force. As a consequence of this sort of humor and the associated commentary on the roles love and lovers play in society, the audience is more easily able to reflect upon their own lives and relationships and can better understand how they fit in the context of their world.

However, Horace is not always omniscient and detached in his love poems. In fact, he often adopts the role of the *praeceptor amoris*, or “professor of love,” in the *Odes* in order to make direct observations about characters within a poem. Taking on this role allows him greater freedom in directing the course of the poem, and accordingly, he often turns to humor to make commentary about the events being depicted. Additionally, and unlike the situation in 3.9, not all of the love poems

involve relationships between members of the same social class. On the contrary, class differences are often the root of humor, as is the case in 2.4, a poem in which Horace uses his role as *praeceptor amoris* to patronize another man. And this is not an unfamiliar scene: In his commentary on 2.4, West notes (30) that it was a convention of Hellenistic poetry to patronize friends about love affairs; especially subject to taunting were class differences between partners in a relationship, which is the situation presented to the audience here. In the poem, Horace offers the audience another familiar scene, this time one in which the poetic persona “Horace” is making fun of Xanthias’s love for a slave girl. It is not uncommon for people to tease their friends about love affairs, and most of the audience will have experienced similar judging of their own relationships. Additionally, many audience members would have been in love with someone seen as “different” and would likely sympathize with Xanthias in his current situation. Thus when Horace comments on love in the poem, his comments are highly relevant to his audience.

Consider the poem below:

Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori,
 Xanthia Phoeu, prius insolentem
 serva Briseis niveo colore
 movit Achillem;
 5 movit Aiacem Telamone natum
 forma captivae dominum Tecmessae;
 arsit Atrides medio in triumpho
 virgine rapta,
 barbarae postquam cecidere turmae
 10 Thessalo victore et ademptus Hector
 tradidit fessis leviora tolli
 Pergama Graias.
 nescias an te generum beati
 Phyllidis flavae decorent parentes:
 15 regium certe genus et penatis
 maeret iniquos.
 crede non illam tibi de scelesta
 plebe dilectam, neque sic fidelem,
 sic lucro aversam potuisse nasci
 20 matre pudenda.
 bracchia et vultum teretesque suras
 integer laudo; fuge suspicari
 cuius octavum trepidavit aetas
 claudere lustrum.

[tr. Niall Rudd]

Don’t be ashamed, Phocian Xanthias, of loving a servant: in earlier days the slave girl Briseis with her snow-white skin roused the haughty Achilles; the beauty of the captive Tecmessa roused Ajax, son of Telamon, though he was her master; the son of Atreus, in his hour of victory, was kindled with passion for a girl who was dragged away when the foreign hosts fell before the conquering Thessalian, and the removal of Hector had made Troy’s citadel easier to capture for the battle-weary Greeks.

You never know: your flaxen-haired Phyllis may have well-to-do parents who would reflect glory on their son-in-law. Without a doubt the family she weeps for has royal blood, and its gods have turned unfairly against her. You may be sure that the girl you love does not come from the criminal classes, and that one so loyal and so loth to make money could not be the daughter of an embarrassing mother. I admire her arms and face and shapely legs— though quite disinterested, of course; you mustn’t for a moment suspect one whose age has all too soon brought his eighth quinquennium to a close!

After the brief introduction in the first two lines, the first half of the poem adopts the style of epic parody in contrast with the second half. A Roman audience would likely have been familiar with the characters introduced—Achilles, Ajax, and

Agamemnon—their romantic pursuits, and the literary works in which they appeared. But it is unlikely that they would expect the love for slaves described here to be expressed in such epic terms, especially when the situation at hand is far from epic. Additionally, the mythical slave girls were of relatively high status; they were captives of war rather than slaves born into slavery and sold at market. Briseis, who was a princess prior to her capture, is described as having pale white skin (*niveo colore*, 3), a description quite atypical for a slave.¹⁰ Thus, though these comparisons, Horace has embarrassed Xanthias and associated his girlfriend with women that surpass her in status. And, though Horace has encouraged Xanthias not to be ashamed (*ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori*, 1), there is irony in the fact that he has gone out of his way to do exactly that. Thus, by likening his descriptions of Xanthias's girlfriend to myth, Horace introduces humor into the poem by elevating the situation to epic proportions when it is little more than poking fun at an acquaintance.

The fact that the women, be they slave girls or otherwise, in the first half of the poem have a good deal of power over their male counterparts is also unexpected. Xanthias is quite clearly caught up in his love and is compared grandiosely to the mythological characters. For the audience, the humorous thought of becoming enslaved to a slave surfaces, emphasized by striking anaphora (*movit Achillem / movit Aiace*, 4-5), as two of the heroes become direct objects of their lovers' influences. Agamemnon, the third hero, has no more agency in his actions as he burns for his mistress, suggesting that she is the spark that kindles his desires (*arsit Atrides*, 8).

With this epic backdrop in mind, the audience is led to expect something equally grand to befall Xanthias and Phyllis, the object of Xanthias's affection; for instance, they might anticipate Horace going on to praise Phyllis's status because of his indication that the aforementioned women were of relatively high status despite their eventual slavery. And, while Horace goes on to say this at face value (*regium certe genus et penatis / maeret iniquos*, 15-16), he does so ironically. Just afterwards, he introduces the image of Phyllis belonging to the wicked plebeian class (*crede non illam tibi de scelestis / plebe dilectam*, 17-18), which is far from reassuring for Xanthias. *Crede* with the negative sense is sarcastic here; there is no way to obliquely introduce the idea that Phyllis is of a low class without insinuating that it is true. Therefore, while Horace speaks as if to sincerely approve of Xanthias's choice in Phyllis, even mentioning the idea of her having a base background is humorous and incongruous with the idea of praise. Yet Horace does not dwell on this point: The fact that the mention of her inferiority is so brief but acerbic suggests that it suffices to convey the point; Horace's true intentions are abundantly clear, both to Xanthias and the audience.

By the time Horace concludes his mock-praise for Phyllis and her family, the ideas introduced by the seemingly comforting *ne ... pudori* in line 1 are thoroughly negated by the harshness of his comments, emphasized by the negative *nescias an* (13), *crede non* (17), and *neque ... pudenda* (18-20). By discussing Phyllis's background to the extent that he does—and with *certe* (15) hardly feeling

¹⁰ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 70.

genuine—Horace encourages the audience to think of the worst-case scenario, one in which she is a slave, brought up by a poor family, and the polar opposite of the mythical women introduced earlier. With a final jab at Phyllis's mother (*matre pudenda*, 20), Horace rounds out the part of the poem that has to do with Xanthias.

But then Horace introduces a twist as he goes on to focus the poem on himself in the fifth stanza. It is surely humorous, as Horace tries to explain why old men cannot lust for young women (surely they can and do, and he is only 40!). West notes that he returns to an embellished, somewhat Homeric description of Phyllis's calves: In using *teretesque suras* (21), "Horace has raised his eyes a little from *sphura*, the ankle, to *sura*, the calf" to relate to Homer's *kallisphuros*, "of the beautiful ankles."¹¹ The implication is that a maidservant's dress would be much shorter than a matron's, so Phyllis is quite clearly a slave and the object of sexual attention. This makes it hard to believe Horace when he suggests that he is entirely uninterested. If anything, he has undermined his supposedly encouraging comments earlier in the poem and shown himself to be desirous of Phyllis; by now, it is not hard to construe his earlier comments as a means of encouraging Xanthias to end his relationship with his girlfriend, who is supposedly unattractive for social reasons, and instead leave her to Horace who, despite her supposed shortcomings, is still attracted to her. This idea speaks to the power of women over men that was alluded to earlier in reference to mythical characters; if women can overpower them, they can—and evidently do—hold considerable sway over men, as is evidenced by Horace's lascivious comments at the end of the poem.

Social commentary regarding the role of love and lovers abounds here. First, the notion that Horace plays the part of a sound commentator on love is invalidated. While he may have experience with love, his advice to Xanthias is certainly not as neutral as the position of *praeceptor amoris* might suggest. Second, the idea that social status matters in the context of love becomes irrelevant: Xanthias is in love with Phyllis regardless of her social standing, and apparently Horace is too. So even he, as a self-professed old man, is subject to human desires and not immune to the "laws" of social custom that he encourages Xanthias to abide by for his own gain. Third, the role of women is strongly emphasized in all the relationships in the poem. As was previously mentioned, women hold a surprising amount of sway over their male counterparts, and though Horace is not suggesting that they ought to be given more agency in relationships, the idea that they have some degree of control is certainly intact, especially since Phyllis seems to entrance Horace, our narrator, by the end of the poem. Fourth, the human tendency to become entangled in socially inappropriate or embarrassing relationships is put on display. According to Horace, Xanthias has caught himself up with a lowly slave girl, but the fact that she manages to catch Horace's eye as well suggests that no one, regardless of age or social standing, is immune to such emotions.

The humor here lies in the differences between the audience's expectation of relationship advice and Horace's incongruous suggestions and commentary. He fails to accomplish the main goal of a love counselor, namely helping the person in question with their relationship. Instead, he rebukes Xanthias and introduces

¹¹ West (1999) 32.

himself as a potential rival in pursuit of Phyllis. From this incongruity stems humor, both in reference to Horace's treatment of Xanthias and his own treatment of himself.

The trope of pursuit features again in 3.20, a poem that deals with the theme of entanglement in both lovers' roles in relationships and struggles relating to social status. And, though Horace introduces a less common relationship arrangement here—he describes a young boy caught up in a love triangle—there are many familiar aspects of the poem. Of chief importance are conceptions about homosexuality, which had formerly been frowned upon in Rome but, per Nisbet and Rudd (239), was becoming more socially acceptable in the first century BCE partly due to the influx of Greek people and ideas in Rome. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** In particular, it was seen as acceptable to take on the active role in sex with low-class or foreign boys; however, playing the passive role or engaging in a homosexual relationship with a Roman man was not. Consequently, homosexuality was a relevant social topic for Horace's audience, especially regarding the activity or passivity of romantic partners' roles; active participants were not rebuked in the public sentiment whereas passive ones were (240).

In the poem, Horace again adopts the role of *praeceptor amoris* but this time for a less accusatory purpose than in 2.4. He warns a young man, Pyrrhus, not to pursue an adolescent, Nearchus, because he is under the control of a domineering woman. However, this does not keep Horace from making pointed yet humorous remarks about his behavior:

Non vides quanto moveas periclo,
 Pyrrhe, Gaetulae catulos leaenae?
 dura post paulo fugies inaudax
 proelia raptor,
 5 cum per obstantis iuvenum catervas
 ibit insignem repetens Nearchum,
 grande certamen, tibi praeda cedat
 maior an illi.
 interim, dum tu celeris sagittas
 10 promis, haec dentis acuit timendos,
 arbiter pugnae posuisse nudo
 sub pede palmam
 fertur et leni recreare vento
 sparsum odoratis umerum capillis,
 15 qualis aut Nireus fuit aut aquosa
 raptus ab Ida.
 [tr. Niall Rudd]

Do you not see, Pyrrhus, what a risk you take in meddling with the cubs of a Gaetolian lioness? Before long, because you're a robber without courage, you will run away from the deadly encounter, when she makes her way through the crowds of young men that block her path, bent on reclaiming the strikingly beautiful Nearchus. It is a momentous point of contention whether a greater prize is to go to you or to her.
 In the meantime, while you take out your swift arrows and she sharpens her fearsome teeth, the one who decides the contest, they say, has put his bare foot on the palm of victory, and cools his shoulders in the gentle breeze as they are brushed by his scented hair—like Nireus, or the one who was carried off from many-fountained Ida.

The poem begins as a Greek figure named Pyrrhus is introduced, a name that, though strange in a love poem, would be well known to a Roman audience. Pyrrhus of Epirus was a Greek general known for his habit of winning battles at a heavy cost to his own forces, and the name also belonged to Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles and conqueror of Priam in the *Aeneid*. Thus, by bestowing this name on the man

with whom he is speaking, Horace instills in the character a grand and militaristic background that all would recognize. However, the picture Horace goes on to paint of Pyrrhus is a confusing one. Any Pyrrhus known to the audience surely belongs in battle, yet here, Horace describes him in an entirely different scenario: He is in danger as a result of snatching cubs from a lioness (*quanto moveas periclo / Pyrrhe, Gaetulae catulos leaenae*, 1-2). The subsequent descriptors of Pyrrhus are equally out of place since a war hero associated with courage would not be likely to flee uncourageously (*fugies inaudax / proelia*, 3-4), pathetically steal from an animal (*raptor*, 4), or fall in battle at the hands of a woman. Thus the audience is left in the dark at the start of the poem as they are presented with an incongruous and humorous description of Pyrrhus—who is associated with conquerors by name—skulking about in the forest.

The audience is kept attentive as the poem goes on to pose a somewhat obscure question, composed in lofty terms, that introduces Horace's intent to parody epic style in the rest of the poem. It soon becomes evident that Pyrrhus is being compared to a timid hunter (*inaudax ... raptor*, 3-4) who is in conflict with the woman, represented by the lioness and her cubs (*catulos leaenae*, 2). But in line 6 we arrive at the poem's twist when Horace suddenly curtails the crescendoing descriptions of a battle-to-be and reveals to the audience that Pyrrhus and a woman are fighting over the affection of a boy, Nearchus. There is certainly humor in these aggrandized comparisons since there is no squabble brewing: Pyrrhus is merely a suitor, and the woman is fending off suitors like him so that she can maintain her relationship with Nearchus (*per obstantis iuvenum catervas / ibit*, 5-6).

The epic comparisons of the first two stanzas therefore describe a mundane situation, and they continue into the third stanza as Horace reintroduces the theme of warfare while exploring the battle preparations of each participant in the relationship: Pyrrhus readies arrows (*tu celeris sagittas / promis*, 9-10), the woman sharpens her teeth (*haec dentis acuit timendos*, 10), but Nearchus, apparently uninterested in the fighting about him, symbolically steps on a palm branch (*arbiter pugnae posuisse nudo / sub pede palmum*, 11-12)—a symbol of Roman victory—such that neither of the two can claim victory over him. Nearchus's appearance is then described in extravagant lines yet again (13-14), and he is finally likened to two mythological figures (15-16). One of these (*Nireus*, 15) was remarkable for his beauty and habit of being a pacifist in times of conflict,¹² whereas the other handsome man, Ganymede, was snatched away from Mount Ida (*raptus ab Ida*, 16) to serve Jupiter in an erotic capacity.¹³

The militaristic comparisons are perhaps most telling since they relate love and war, and to this end, Horace makes an effort to conflate the hunting descriptions with those of conflict. Battle is mentioned three times (*proelia*, 4; *certamen*, 7; and generally, 9-11), and Horace describes the characters within military terms; even Nearchus's other suitors are compared to a band of young soldiers (*iuvenum catervas*, 5). Horace's commentary here is humorous: Since a relationship between a man and a woman was commonly represented as a type of war, Pyrrhus, a man, is

¹² West (2002) 178.

¹³ Nisbet and Rudd 245.

out of place in entering this disagreement to try to win over Nearchus. Additionally, the main conflict we see is between suitors, not lovers, which suggests that Pyrrhus, the renowned general, is trying to enter the wrong kind of war, and therefore he is set up to lose. This incongruous scenario speaks to the great lengths men go to to win lovers and, as is the case here, the futility of such actions.¹⁴

And, though Horace is still speaking metaphorically about the lioness and Pyrrhus as a hunter, there is further humor in the comparisons. The grand preparations made by Nearchus's admirers to garner his affections are strictly military, and unlike, say, the Romeo-esque suitor in 3.10, neither suitor appeals to Nearchus's emotions in an effort to win him over. As such, and despite the fact that love and war are related in this poem, their efforts are somewhat out of place in the realm of love. More specifically, they are incongruous with the picture of Nearchus given to the audience, which is almost entirely erotic and has little to do with war (13-16). And, if we extrapolate the war metaphor, we find that Nearchus is in fact objectified by the actions of his suitors. He is little more than the booty to be won, and as such, there is humor when the audience finds out that the actions the first ten lines of the poem describe—the foundation and crescendoing descriptions of war—fail to impress the boy, who denies both suitors the palm branch of victory (*sub pede palmam*, 11). This contrast between the suitors' passions for Nearchus and his blasé response is stark and therefore entertaining and also encourages the audience to reflect on the nature of the tactics of the "chase" found in flirting and relationships. Horace depicts love as a difficult form of conflict (*grande certamen, tibi praeda cedit / maior an illi*, 7-8) that can even be impersonal for those in the place of Nearchus. The pugilistic nature of the contest is emphasized by *certamen*, as is the idea that Nearchus is simply a prize to be won. His feelings of apathy are further emphasized by the comparison of him to *multiple* lion cubs (*catulos leaenae*, 2) since, by referring to Nearchus in the plural, Horace numerically mis-quantifies him, just as the suitors in the poem mis-quantify—or rather, fail to quantify at all—his emotions in their relationship.

This characterization initially leaves Nearchus the weakest character in the love triangle. However, there is another twist in the poem when Nearchus becomes the arbiter of events in line 11, and the setting changes too. Now the events are taking place in a space for exercising, and a non-Horatian narrator reports the characters' actions (*fertur*, 13). It seems that the love triangle has become the talk of the town, and the previously powerless character has now become the most powerful. This provides Horace with the opportunity to describe him in detail, which he proceeds to do without sparing any description of his body. In fact, several of the descriptions are bordering on erotic (*insignem*, 7; *nudo*, 11; *sparsum odoratis umerum capillis*, 14), which introduces the question, which Horace posed early on, as to whether or not the boy is worth having. As a result of these descriptions, it is hard for the audience to imagine that there was no interest in the boy; both suitors have demonstrated their desire to have him, and Horace's allusions to Nireus's beauty and Ganymede's erotic service to Jupiter suggest that even he finds Nearchus attractive. Thus, much like in 2.4, we are left with a situation in which Horace inserts

¹⁴ West (2002) 176-178.

himself into a scene. However, his commentary here is not on class differences as it is on the folly of the relationships in this love triangle.

From the onset, the audience is presented with a scene in which two suitors go to great lengths to try to obtain a disinterested boy's attention. No steps are taken to address the warning Horace gave Pyrrhus about danger early on (*periculo*, 1); and, if anything, the audience now recognizes the irony in his name, for his efforts have resulted in unrequited love and Pyrrhic failure. Thus any preconceptions the audience might have had about a Pyrrhic victory are thoroughly dashed. However, in a sense, there was never any hope for a long-lasting relationship between Pyrrhus and Nearchus in the first place; as a young man, Nearchus was bound to reach adulthood and would eventually seek relationships with women. Older Roman men would have known this about their younger lovers, so the fact that Pyrrhus still devotes himself to trying to snatch up Nearchus leaves him on the wrong side of the affair, as is evidenced by the contrast between his passionate attempts to win the boy and Nearchus's apathy.

Thus, through his unexpected and humorous twists, Horace evokes reflection upon the conventional roles and situations of love. This humor, which in the love poems focuses on people's roles within relationships, takes on different forms as the themes of poems change: Differences in social standing and role reversals feature particularly frequently and allow Horace to insert commentary about the futility, fickleness, and even irony of love, amongst other topics. And, of course, these humorous bits make it easier for the audience to understand Horace's commentary in addition to encouraging them to think more deeply about the roles they play in their own relationships.

While still stemming from many of the same sources, humor plays a slightly different role in Horace's convivial poems. In his love poems, the primary focus of humor was on people's relationships with each other, but in the case of the convivial poems, the practice of drinking itself takes center stage. As a result of this, Horace is therefore able to use humor to comment upon the power wine has over people, via its role as an institution in society, in the convivial poems. Consider *Odes* 1.27, a poem that winds conversationally between discussing drink and a young man:

Natis in usum laetitiae scyphis
pugnare Thracum est: tollite barbarum
 morem, verecundumque Bacchum
 sanguineis prohibete rixis.
5 vino et lucernis Medus acinaces
immane quantum discrepat: impium
 lenite clamorem, sodales,
 et cubito remanete presso.
vultis severi me quoque sumere
10 partem Falerni? dicat Opuntiae
 frater Megyllae, quo beatus
 vulnere, qua pereat sagitta.
cessat voluntas? non alia bibam

mercede. quae te cumque domat Venus,
15 non erubescendis adurit
 ignibus, ingenuoque semper
amore peccas. quidquid habes, age
depone tutis auribus. a! miser,
 quanta laborabas in Charybdi,
20 digne puer meliore flamma.
quae saga, quis te solvere Thessalis
magus venenis, quis poterit deus?
 vix illigatum te triformi
 Pegasus expediet Chimaera.

[tr. Niall Rudd]

Tankards were meant for joy; only Thracians use them as weapons. Away with that barbarous behaviour, and protect Bacchus, who is a respectable deity, from bloody brawls! Where there is wine and lamplight a Persian dagger is utterly out of place. Quieten down this unholy row, my friends, and stay where you are, reclining on your elbow. Do you want me to drink my share of dry Falernian? Well then, let Megylla's brother from Opus tell us what wound and what arrow have caused the blissful death that he dies. You're reluctant to agree,

are you? Well, I shan't drink on any other terms. Whatever beauty queen has you under her thumb, there's no need to blush for the ardour she incites—you always fall for the more respectable type. Whatever your plight, come, whisper it in my ear; it's safe there...Ah! You poor fellow! What a Charybdis you're caught in! My boy, you deserve a better flame. What witch, what wizard with Thessalian drugs, what god will be able to set you free? You are held in the toils of a threefold Chimaera, and even a Pegasus will find it hard to extricate you.

Humor is present from the beginning of the poem, as Horace, who takes on the role of *arbiter bibendi*, grandiloquently describes the scene. In this role, Horace's main duty is determine the ratio of water to wine that will be consumed, effectively controlling how fast the drinkers get drunk. This gives him control over the events at the party, the other partygoers, and, in a way, over the course of the poem that is to follow. Thus from the onset, Horace has introduced the themes of power and social pressure to the drinking scene, two ideas he develops more thoroughly later on.

Nevertheless, with Horace in control, the audience can expect the poem to be entertaining. The events described take place at a drinking party where emotions are about to boil over, a scene that would have been well known to members of the audience. And, by relating events from the point of view of a reveler actively involved in the party, Horace gives his audience a more complete view of wine's social effects. Instead of listening in on individual conversations, as was common in the love poems, the audience is granted wider access to the scene, almost as if they were present or overhearing it from nearby. From this vantage point, they are more easily able to judge the occasion as the social institution that it is. To this end, Horace begins by describing the partygoers' drinking goblets as made for enjoyment (*natis in usum laetitiae scyphis*, 1) using a term, *natis*, that is generally reserved for people.¹⁵ Though seemingly out of place, this careful diction introduces the idea that the practice of drinking was deeply ingrained in Roman society to the point that the drink itself came to life at parties. The idea of personifying wine, though hyperbolic, is much in line with the grand themes of the rest of the poem and in fact reappears in *Odes* 3.21 in an address to a wine jug (cf. page 21 below). However, the notion that goblets were made for happiness aligns well with the audience's preconceptions about the role of drinking in society: It produces revelry and, generally speaking, fun. As a result, Horace's fastidious treatment of the party that follows, which is characterized in part by his use of strict imperatives throughout (e.g. *tollite*, 2; *prohibete*, 4; *lenite*, 7; *remanete*, 8), is incongruous with their preexisting beliefs of drinking being carefree, an effect that contributes to the humor of the scene.

¹⁵ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 312.

First, Horace goes on to describe the brawl that is about to break out in elevated and satirical terms. He calls it a Thracian affair (*pugnare Thracum est*, 2), imploring his drinking buddies not to fight in a barbaric manner. There is a hint of commentary regarding young men's enthusiasm for getting drunk present in this line, as Horace expresses distaste for similar youthful exuberance elsewhere.¹⁶ However, there is also irony in it since he is not only partaking in but also leading the festivities here. Thus the audience may question Horace's moralizing efforts that follow. For example, his reasoning for breaking up the fight that develops would be less than sound to any sober audience: He begs the revelers to uphold the virtues of Bacchus, whom he describes as venerable in an oxymoron that is certainly humorous (*verecundumque Bacchum / sanguineis prohibete rixis*, 3-4) since Bacchus is anything but modest, after which he tries to return the party to a state of peaceful drinking (*lenite clamorem, sodales / et cubito remanete presso*, 7-8). Then, evidently facing some backlash for trying to curtail the rowdiness, Horace threatens to stop his own drinking—and therefore everyone else's, since he is still the *arbiter bibendi*—(*vultis severi me quoque sumere / partem Falerni*, 9-10) unless the unruliness stops. And, since disorder is not mentioned thereafter, it is safe to assume that it ended, showcasing both the power that Horace has over the party as *arbiter bibendi* and the power that wine has at social events; the power of the latter is especially on display since the course of the party, and even the poem, changes after threats of removing it are made.

Up to this point, Horace's treatment of the mores of drinking is relatively serious. However, there is humor in his depiction of events simply because drinking is *not* such a serious affair, and audiences would recognize this. For example, the proper drinking pose (*cubito remanete presso*, 8) that Horace encourages others to adopt would simply require people to drink in a different posture, so Horace is not seriously criticizing their drinking etiquette; while the audience might suspect that the partygoers have been gesticulating at each other, it is unlikely that they were going for each others' throats. Similarly, his threats about cutting off the flow of wine are hardly genuine since few inebriated men make such threats seriously. And, as we soon discover, all of the power that Horace generates from his role as *arbiter bibendi* is directed towards making the party more enjoyable for all, not for nefarious or self-serving purposes. Consequently, we must understand Horace's role to be that of a lighthearted merryman, and we must not take his words at face value.

However, the main twist of the poem occurs when Horace uses his power over the party to change the topic of discussion from wine and revelry to the romantic affairs of a young man (*dicat Opuntiae / frater Megyllae, quo beatus / vulnere, qua pereat sagitta*, 10-12). There is humor in this change as Horace identifies the man with only a circumlocutory description, which suggests either that, under the influence of wine, Horace may have forgotten his name or that Horace is elevating his language once again and using circumlocution as a mock epic device. In either case, there is commentary here regarding wine's potency as a social lubricant; without the drinking, the events described in the poem would not have

¹⁶ West (2002) 126.

progressed this far in this manner. Horace then goes on to poke fun at the man by asking him a series of hyperbolized questions. He inquires, in the overstated and conventional metaphors of love, about the aspects of the man's relationship that are causing him pain (*vulnere; pereat*). The metaphorical violence described here picks up the physical violence mentioned earlier on and its purpose—mocking both friends and acquaintances—also remains constant. Furthermore, the man remains unnamed throughout the poem and is only identified through his sister (the best description we get is *Opuntiae / frater Megyllae*, 10-11). Apart from this being a mildly emasculating description that sets him up for more of Horace's abuse, this nomenclature hints that his sister is well known to the partygoers, perhaps as a result of her ill repute.¹⁷ This would, of course, make the man's situation more unpleasant. And, if West's claim is true, it would humorously associate the partygoers themselves with the same sort of women.

When the man hesitates to respond to Horace's bombastic teasing, Horace again threatens to stop the drinking unless his terms are met (*cessat voluntas? non alia bibam / mercede*, 13-14), which soon causes the young man to give in. Thus the power of wine over the scene is again on display as is the pressure that Horace is able to leverage by wielding it as a social tool to get the man to speak. However, Horace abuses his power to some extent here; moments after encouraging the man to disclose his new love interest with a promise of secrecy, Horace exclaims once he finds out who the love interest is and presumably shares the man's secret with everyone at the party (*depone tutis auribus. a! miser*, 18). While there is humor in Horace's abrupt response, the scene points to a common social practice of drunkenly speculating about, and subsequently embarrassing, guests at a symposium,¹⁸ which is precisely what occurs here (14-17). The language of the poem even emphasizes it: The mention of the man's repeated interactions with reputable women (*ingenuoque semper / amore peccas*, 16-17) is humorously ironic and introduces the contrary notion, that he is partial to women of ill repute, which recalls Horace's rebuke of Xanthias in 2.4. The imperfect, repetitive sense of *laborabas* (19) suggests that the symposium has often heard tales of his endeavors before, further diminishing the likelihood that they were all with respectable women. Thus, the man is utterly ensnared, both in terms of his sticky relationship (19) and in a social sense. He is at the mercy of wine's effects on the party and its guests; Horace, as the ruler of the wine, is chiefly responsible for its impact on the partygoers, and the fact that it gets the better of him in particular is both humorous and speaks to its power as a social institution.

Horace's commentary here is reflected in the actions of his *arbiter bibendi* persona in the poem. When discussing matters related to love, wine has made Horace into a drunken *praeceptor amoris* whose comments are now reliant on power in the symposium as opposed to being reliant on advice, be it good or bad, in the love poems. In fact, he offers only jokes and teasing, and notably no advice at all, in 1.27. Additionally, without the institution of convivial drinking, there would be no need to select a powerful and potentially manipulative *arbiter bibendi*, which in turn

¹⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁸ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 314.

would remove the themes of power and social pressure from the poem. However, not all symposia are so eventful. On the contrary, Horace, again the *arbiter bibendi* in 3.19, describes a gathering that commences with a man telling an uninteresting narrative while everyone else, Horace included, wants to discuss drinking instead. In stark contrast to 1.27, Horace's commentary in this poem investigates wine's power to cause people to self-reflect:

Quantum distet ab Inacho
Codrus pro patria non timidis mori,
narras et genus Aeaci
et pugnata sacro bella sub Ilio:
5 quo Chium pretio cadum
mercemur, quis aquam temperet ignibus
quo praebente domum et quota
Paelignis caream frigore, taces.
da lunae propere novae,
10 da noctis mediae, da, puer, auguris
Murenae: tribus aut novem
miscentur cyathis pocula commodis.
qui Musas amat imparis,
ternos ter cyathos attonitus petet
15 vates; tris prohibet supra
rixarum metuens tangere Gratia
nudis iuncta sororibus.
insanire iuvat; cur Berecynthiae
cessant flamina tibiae?
20 cur pendet tacita fistula cum lyra?
parentis ego dexteris
odi: sparge rosas: audiat invidus
dementem strepitum Lycus
et vicina seni non habilis Lyco.
25 spissa te nitidum coma,
puro te similem, Telephe, Vespero,
tempesta petit Rhode:
me lentus Glycerae torret amor meae.
[tr. Niall Rudd]

The length of time between Inachus and Codrus, who was not afraid to die for his country, the line descending from Aeacus, and the wars fought beneath sacred Troy: all this you tell us at length. What price we have to pay for a jar of Chian, who is to heat the water with fire, at whose house and at what time I can get out of this Paelignian cold: of all this you say nothing.

Quick, my boy, prepare a toast to the new month, to midnight, to Murena the augur! Cups are mixed appropriately with three or nine ladles. The inspired poet who loves the odd-numbered Muses will ask for three times three ladles; the Grace who links arms with her naked sisters does not allow more than three, for fear of brawls. I want to go mad.

Why have the blasts of the Berecynian pipe not begun? Why does the syrinx just hang beside the silent lyre? I detest close-fisted hands. Scatter roses! Let that killjoy Lycus hear the wild uproar, and the woman next door who is not well matched with old Lycus. You, Telephus, who, with your thick shiny hair, are like the clear Evening Star, receive the attentions of Rosy, who is just the right age for you. I burn with a smouldering passion for my Sweetheart.

The poem begins with a tiresome speaker telling a long story about history and genealogies (1-4). And, though discussion of these matters was a popular topic in the symposia of the time¹⁹ and would have been known to audience members who participated in similar events, it contrasts in style with Horace's grand introduction of the drinking scene in 1.27. But in 3.19, we immediately see the power wine has over Horace as it causes him to self-reflect: It is not hard to imagine him sitting in an armchair with his chin on his hand anxiously wondering when the man will stop

¹⁹ West (2002) 166-168.

blathering on—as is suggested by the present tense of *narras* (3)—so that the partygoers can start discussing the most relevant matter at any drinking party, namely the wine. Thus there is a difference between the events that are transpiring and those that he wishes would occur. The speaker's timely mention of the name Codrus is ironic in that it was “proverbial for old-fashioned ways,”²⁰ such as those the man himself exhibits by not discussing wine when it is the sole topic on everyone else's minds. As such, the scene itself is humorous, and Horace's impatience boils over when he addresses the man directly (*taces*, 8). By posing a series of questions that steer conversation in the direction of wine (*quo pretio*, 5; *quis temperet*, 6; *quo domum*, 7; *quota caream*; 7-8), he manages to address all the practical details relating to the party in one sentence, points which the man's obscure historical ramblings did not even begin to cover in the many minutes prior. As such, the man's reluctance to discuss wine is even more humorous as it becomes clear that the wine, and not the discussion, is the main event at these gatherings.

At this point, the poem twists, and some amount of time passes.²¹ The scene moves the audience into the heart of the drinking party, where Horace has again taken control of proceedings: His three demands that wine be produced to celebrate the augurship of Murena (*da*, 9-10) complement his three questions beginning with *quo* in 5-7, which are now answered since wine has become available. Furthermore, Horace skillfully reflects on the speaker's dull discussion of the reigns of two legendary kings (*ab Inacho / Codrus pro patria non timidus mori*, 1-2) by comparing those scenes to Murena's forthcoming reign as augur (*auguris / Murenae*, 10-11), which, unlike the speaker's story, is worth drinking to. Thus Horace is doing everything in his power to steer the party back on track, which he ultimately does with humorous flair.

An important question remains, however, regarding the ratio of water and wine that is to be mixed for drinking (11-17). There were twelve parts in a Roman mixing bowl, and, in cases like this, whether a man drank a mixture that was three parts water to nine parts wine or vice versa was up to his own discretion.²² Next, Horace proclaims in grand style that he will take the stronger one to match the number of Muses (*ternos ter cyathos attonitus petet / vates*, 14-15). Thus Horace's self-inflation (*attonitus vates*) is dramatic, and his reasoning is humorous since it is an arbitrary reason to consume more wine. Still, Horace notes that he is still acting within the limits of acceptable behavior; anything more than the 9:3 ratio he has adopted would make the party prone to the kind of brawling seen in 1.27 (*tris prohibet supra / rixarum metuens tangere Gratia*, 15-16). However, he does not seem to be making much of an effort to avoid such brawls given that he favors the wine-heavy ratio and states his desire to go mad (*insanire iuvat*, 18) at the party. This rowdiness is incongruous with the slow start to the poem and is seemingly more in line with 1.27 than 3.19. Additionally, this mention of reckless partying retrospectively begs a question of Horace's portrayal of himself as *arbiter bibendi* in 1.27: If he was in control of himself at that time, why was that party growing out of

²⁰ Nisbet and Rudd (1989) 230.

²¹ West (2002) 170.

²² Nisbet and Rudd (1989) 235.

hand? It seems that wine's influence over him and wine-fuelled pressures from the other partygoers may have induced him to make a poor decision that resulted in that party evolving into one of excessive drinking.

Horace then urges the partygoers to begin drinking heavily as he wants the party to progress towards rowdiness (*insanire iuvat*, 18). In fact, Horace seems antsy because the party has not begun; he begs questions (*cur*, 18; 20) of the revelers and encourages them to let loose for the sake of a good time that even the neighbors will hear and be jealous of (*sparge rosas: audiat invidus / dementem strepitum Lycus*, 22-23). However, as the party presumably gets going, Horace becomes strangely reflective. After mentioning his desire to bother an old man, Lycus, and his female partner with his party, Horace, likely intoxicated at this point, notes that she does not suit Lycus as a result of their age difference (*et vicina seni non habilis Lyco*, 24). This is an unexpected terminus of Horace's illustration of the party; the audience might expect him, inebriated, to rebuke the couple or to show interest in the young woman, as he did with Xanthias and Phyllis in 2.4. However, Horace simply moves on to address a partygoer, Telephus, and his girlfriend, Rhode, who are well matched (*tempestiva*, 27). Then, in contrast to both of the other couples, Horace describes his own passions as slowly burning (*me lentus Glycerae torret amor meae*, 28). In doing so, he situates himself somewhere between the other couples on the spectrum of passion: He is not as amorous as the young man—a distinction that is heightened by the similar uses of *te* and *me* in 25-26 and 28, respectively—nor is he as mismatched with his lover as the old man. Additionally, the verbs Horace uses to describe the men's lovers' desires are different: Rhode actively seeks out Telephus (*petit*, 27), Horace smolders for Glycera (*torret*, 28), and Lycus's girlfriend is simply not well suited for him (*seni non habilis Lyco*, 24). However, the poem ends abruptly after these comparisons are described, so it is up to the audience to interpret Horace's intentions in making them.

It is clear that Horace's direct insertion of himself into the final stanza of the poem is surprising, especially since the portrait he paints of himself is vague and mildly self-deprecating. Perhaps, after several glasses of wine, Horace is looking around the room and sees a young couple in the early stages of a relationship. He considers them thoughtfully, and determines that his own love differs from theirs in a way that, were it not for wine's effects on him, he might not otherwise have considered. In particular, his self-reflection reveals that his love affair is unrequited—there is notably no mention of Glycera's affections for Horace—so perhaps he is not particularly well suited for her. However, under the influence of wine and the party atmosphere, it may be his hope that Glycera will become more accessible to him. This approach leaves the odd inclusion of Lycus unsettled, though it is feasible that Lycus represents what Horace fears becoming: Lycus envies the parties other are having—just as Horace envies Telephus's relationship with Rhode—yet does not have one himself. Additionally, due to his age, Lycus represents what Horace stands to become if he does not find a compatible lover. As a result, the audience is left with an incongruous yet humorous picture of a middle-aged Horace actively trying to initiate a drinking party, but when he does, the effects of wine merely induce him to self-reflect. However, Horace's wine-induced reflections are not the full extent of his appreciation for drinking. Wine was very

much a part of the Roman experience, so much in fact that Horace equates it to religion in another ode, 3.21, which is addressed to a wine jar:

O nata mecum consule Manlio,
seu tu querelas sive geris iocos
 seu rixam et insanos amores
 seu facilem, pia testa, somnum,
5 quocumque lectum nomine Massicum
servas, moveri digna bono die,
 descende, Corvino iubente
 promere languidiora vina.
non ille, quamquam Socraticis madet
10 sermonibus, te negleget horridus:
 narratur et prisci Catonis
 saepe mero caluisse virtus.
tu lene tormentum ingenio admoves
plerumque duro; tu sapientium
15 curas et arcanum iocoso
 consilium retegis Lyaeo;
tu spem reducis mentibus anxiis,
virisque et addis cornua pauperi
 post te neque iratos trementi
20 regum apices neque militum arma.
te Liber et, si laeta aderit, Venus
segnesque nodum solvere Gratiae
 viviaeque producent lucernae,
 dum rediens fugat astra Phoebus.
[tr. Niall Rudd]

O born with me in Manlius' consulship,
whether you bring with you reproaches or
fun or quarrels and passionate love or ready
sleep, o kindly jar, under whatever epithet
you preserve the choice Massic, you deserve
to be called forth on an auspicious day; so
come down, for Corvinus urges me to bring
out an especially mellow wine. Although he is
steeped in the Socratic dialogues he will not
neglect you like an uncouth ascetic; they say
that even old Cato, with all his moral rigour,
often thawed out with unmixed wine.
You apply a gentle rack to natures that tend to
be stiff; you disclose the worries of the wise
and their secret thoughts with the help of the
cheerful Loosener. You bring back hope to
anxious minds, and supply strength and
courage to the poor man (after you he no
longer quakes at the angry crowns of
potentates or at soldiers' weapons).
The God of Freedom and Venus, if she is here
in a happy mood, and the Graces who are loth
to undo their knot, and the merrily burning
lamps will attend you all the way until
Phoebus returns and puts the stars to flight.

The audience is briefly misled as the ode begins without an obvious recipient. Only on the fourth line do they discover the real addressee, and in the meantime, they are led to believe that the first three lines are the beginning of an invocation hymn to a deity.²³ Thus, expecting a godly invocation, the audience cannot help but find the incongruity of the situation—the twist—humorous when they discover that Horace is contrasting the majesty of calling upon a god with the less glamorous pursuit of calling upon a wine jug (4). But once the audience learns that the poem is about wine, its descriptor *nata* (1) recalls *natis*, which holds a similar place in 1.27.1, and evokes a humorous mock epic sentiment that pervades the first half of 3.21. This effectively breaks down any preconceptions the audience would have regarding the poem from its onset. Furthermore, there is humor in the way that the jug, itself a mundane object, is incongruously described with an adjective that has a strong religious connotations (*pia*, 4). This helps establish the idea that wine plays an important role in society and indeed equates it with religion, thus meriting Horace's mock sacral tone.

²³ Garrison 323.

Still addressing the wine jug directly, Horace goes on to describe it with the phrase *quocumque lectum nomine* (5), which continues to show Horace's devotion to the wine jug "deity." Similar catchall formulas—such as *quocumque tibi placet nomine*²⁴—were often given to gods so as not to offend them by referring to them by the wrong name. So, by referring to the wine jug as such, Horace keeps from offending it, which insinuates that it has human feelings and extends the lofty descriptions of the first stanza. He also calls upon it to descend (*descende*, 7), as if from the heavens, in mock-ritualistic fashion whereas in reality, it is likely just coming down from the cupboard where other mundane stores are kept. The incongruous association with religion continues as well: Horace references procession rituals by mentioning that the wine jug ought to be paraded about on display (*moveri digna bono die*, 6), an act that physically demonstrates people's worship of wine. He also makes the appreciation of wine widely applicable, much in the same way that religion was pervasive amongst Romans. The fact that Corvinus (9-10), "the most versatile aristocrat in Augustan Rome,"²⁵ and even the strict Cato (11-12) can both appreciate wine further contributes to its power. And, with this ability to erase social bonds, and its place in Rome as an engrained social institution, wine's influence over all sorts of people only grows greater.

However, wine's influence is not always beneficial. For example, while the repetition of *tu* in the following stanzas that detail wine's functions (13; 14; 17) is another mark of the parodic and hymnal style of the poem,²⁶ the image depicted in the fourth stanza (13-14) compares physical torture to the potentially torturous effects that wine has on loosening people's lips, a humorous incongruity that demonstrates the dual nature of wine. Wine can also lead to people disclosing private information (as in 14-16) or revealing their true nature,²⁷ which is not always be desirable. Thus wine, like religion, has the ability to affect social interactions in ways outside of the consumers' control. On this note, we find that Horace has a remarkably different view on wine here than he did in 1.27 and 3.19: Here, wine is largely a harmonizing force. It repairs, restores, comforts, and occasionally harms instead of directly leading to violence, aggression, and uncomfortable situations as it did in 1.27 or to wild partying and ultimately unsatisfying conclusions as it did in 3.19. Thus, in 3.21, a more positive representation of wine's social effects is presented to the audience through the poem's humorous and hymnal characteristics. Horace's commentary relates to the fact that, as in all things, use in moderation can be pleasant while use in excess, as in 1.27, leads to disharmony.

Additionally, 3.21 has a more self-centered, though equally humorous, aspect. Horace was born during the consulship of Manlius, which he mentions in the first line of the poem (*mecum consule Manlio*, 1), thus associating the wine jug with him from birth and emphasizing Roman attitudes towards the process of creating wine. If nothing else, the fact that they willingly record and remember a particular

²⁴ West (2002) 180.

²⁵ Nisbet and Rudd (1989) 246.

²⁶ Ibid., 251.

²⁷ Ibid., 252.

wine jug's birthday just as well as they do for men suggests that it was of considerable importance in their society. A similar obsession with wines' vintage years persists in the present day to the extent that the value of wines often relies heavily on their years of production. It is likely that the same was true for the Romans, and by associating high quality wine with his own existence, Horace humorously siphons off some of the goodness imbued in the wine for himself. As a result, though wine's influence serves as a largely positive force in the poem, Horace demonstrates that it can also be used for selfish ends. Associated with this idea is the fact that Horace gives the wine in the poem his own age. In doing this, he opens up an extended comparison between the wine jar, Corvinus, and himself. Nisbet and Rudd mention (246) that Corvinus was Horace's age, so the fact that Corvinus was well regarded for his oratorical abilities (9-10) may parallel a tacit suggestion by Horace that his poetic skills are of the same caliber. If the metaphor is extended through the poem, it stands that Horace's poetic talent grows as wines improve with age and men become increasingly skilled over time. For this reason, the wine jar may truly be worth worshipping since, it embodies Horace's poetic career.

Thus, in the convivial poems, Horace's take on humor is considerably different than in the love poems. Here, it facilitates commentary on wine's influence over people—be they partygoers, third-party figures, or even Horace himself—rather than addressing the role it plays in relationships. Nonetheless, wine's ability to imbue people with power over others, wistful thoughts, and intoxicated decisions is powerful, and its inclusion in the *Odes* contributes to Horace's larger goal of facilitating social commentary that is brought about by humor.

As was mentioned at the end of 3.21, Horace also constructs humorous situations out of discussions of his own poetry. In doing so, he uses humor for a purpose altogether different from those it has in the love and convivial poems: In poems about his own work—and especially those placed at the beginnings and ends of Books of *Odes*—Horace uses humor flippantly to comment upon his poetic prowess in unexpected ways. Consider 1.1, the very first poem in the *Odes*:

Maecenas atavis edite regibus,
o et praesidium et dulce decus meum,
sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum
collegisse iuvat, metaque fervidis
5 evitata rotis palmaque nobilis
terrarum dominos evehit ad deos;
hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium
certat tergemini tollere honoribus;
illum, si proprio condidit horreo
10 quidquid de Libycis verritur areis.
gaudentem patrios findere sarculo
agros Attalicis condicionibus
numquam demoveas ut trabe Cypria
Myrtoum pavidus nauta secet mare.
15 luctantem Icariis fluctibus Africum

mercator metuens otium et oppidi
laudat rura sui; mox reficit ratis
quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati.
est qui nec veteris pocula Massici
20 nec partem solido demere de die
spernit, nunc viridi membra sub arbuto
stratus, nunc ad aquae lene caput sacrae.
multos castra iuvant et lituo tubae
permixtus sonitus bellaeque matribus
25 detestata. manet sub love frigido
venator tenerae coniugis immemor,
seu visa est catulis cerva fidelibus,
seu rupit teretes Marsus aper plagas.
me doctarum hederæ præmia frontium
30 dis miscent superis, me gelidum nemus

nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori
 secernunt populo, si neque tibiae
 Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia
 Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton.
 35 quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres,
 sublimi feriam sidera vertice.

[tr. Niall Rudd]

Maecenas, descended from royal lineage, my protection, my fame and my joy, there are some who enjoy raising Olympic dust with their chariots (the turning post just cleared by their scorching wheels, and the palm of glory, exalt them to heaven as lords of the earth); one man is delighted if the mob of fickle citizens strive to elevate him to the three great offices; another if he has stored in his own barn every grain that is swept from the threshing floors of Libya. If a man takes pleasure in tilling his father's fields with a hoe, you will never tempt him away, even on Attalus' terms, to become a terrified sailor cleaving the Sea of Myrto in a Cyprian bark. When a gale from Africa fights with the Icarian waves, the frightened trader recommends an easy

life on a farm near his home town; a little later he repairs his shattered fleet, for he cannot learn to put up with modest means. One man does not refuse cups of old Massic, and is prepared to take a slice out of the working day, stretched out at length beneath a leafy arbutus or at the gentle source of a sacred stream. Many enjoy camp life: the braying of horns and trumpets, and the battles so abhorred by mothers. The huntsman, without a thought for his young wife, stays out beneath the freezing sky if a deer has been sighted by the faithful hounds, or a Marsian boar has broken through the fine-spun net.

As for me, the ivy crown, the reward of poetic brows, puts me in the company of the gods above; the cool grove and the light-footed bands of Nymphs and Satyrs set me apart from the crowd, provided Euterpe does not cease to pipe and Polyhymnia does not refuse to tune the Lesbian lyre. But if you rank me among the lyric bards of Greece, I shall soar aloft and strike the stars with my head.

Though Horace formally dedicated 1.1 to his patron Maecenas, his descriptions throughout the poem are bombastic enough that the seriousness of the poem is in doubt. To start, the apostrophic reference to Maecenas, which sets the tone for the majority of the poem, is exaggerated (*o et praesidium et dulce decus meum*, 2) though not necessarily sycophantic. In the following thirty lines, Horace systematically catalogues nine professions—which would all be well known to the audience—and makes each seem “slightly ridiculous.”²⁸ Three of the devices he employs in doing so are then applied to himself—the ninth profession being that of a poet—as the poem concludes with reference to Horace's own poetry.

First of the three is Horace's tendency to generalize certain professions by describing them only in their most extreme circumstances: Olympic charioteers, for example, are hardly divine figures (*terrarium dominos evehit ad deos*, 6), and most will never even win a race (*palmaque nobilis*, 5). Similarly, no granary can possibly store all the grain in Libya (*proprio condidit horreo / quidquid de Libycis verritur areis*, 9-10), and shipwrecked merchants generally do not praise leisure and rebuild destroyed ships only when poverty looms (*otium et oppidi / laudat rura sui; mox*

²⁸ West (1995) 4.

reficit ratis / quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati, 16-18). In making these descriptions, Horace introduces humor into the poem by contrasting the events being depicted and the audience's conventional views about, say, charioteers who spend their time collecting dust on the track (*sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum / collegisse iuvat*, 3-4). This humor is present in the other two devices used and ultimately applies to Horace's perception of himself at the end of the poem.

Second, when he is not generalizing, Horace picks at strangely specific details to characterize different professions: He carefully describes chariot wheels going around a turn (*metaque fervidis / evitata rotis*, 4-5), the type of wine drunks drink (*pocula Massici*, 19), and the kinds of nets wild boars rush through (*rupit teretes Marsus aper plagas*, 28). The humor in this device is similar to that of the first; by over-specifying in his descriptions, Horace goes beyond the audience's knowledge of different professions and replaces their preconceptions about other people with his own hyperbolized versions. His descriptions are those of a connoisseur who understands the finer points of each profession, and there is humor in this because, as a poet, Horace has no firsthand experience with any of these professions. Nonetheless, his readiness and ability to portray each so vividly further attests to his poetic tact.

Third, Horace describes people striving to achieve their goals through physically raising things: Charioteers raise palm fronds upon victory (*palmaque nobilis*, 5), successful politicians are raised through the ranks (*tergeminis tollere honoribus*, 8), peasants raise mattocks to till the fields (*findere sarculo / agros*, 11-12), merchants raise up destroyed ships through repair (17-18), drunkards raise goblets (19), and war horns must be physically lifted in order to metaphorically raise the sounds of battle (*lituo tubae / permixtus sonitus*, 23-24). This device is humorous mainly as a result of its repetition, and it seems that, if Horace emphasizes the idea that lifting things up results in their success often enough, that success may actually come true.

In using these three devices to poke fun at other professions throughout the poem, Horace sets the stage for the final twist in the poem, his discussion of himself. And, at face value, he treats the poetic profession no differently than any of the others. He exaggerates when setting himself amongst the gods (*dis miscent superis*, 30); he emphasizes small details in distinguishing his work from that of other professions (*nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori / secernunt populo*, 31-32); and he physically lifts himself up by rhetorically asking if he can be raised to the level of the great lyric poets (*quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres*, 35). There are, of course, the same kinds of humor in these comparisons as there were in those found earlier in the poem. However, Horace takes matters a step further when commenting about his own poetic tact. Most obviously, in elevating himself as much as he does, Horace bumps his head on the stars (*sublimi feriam sidera vertice*, 36), which humorously suggests that, though he can lift himself to the level of the gods—presumably the limit of other people's aspirations—he does have limits of his own. It is not hard to imagine the audience laughing at this line, emphasized by its placement at the very end of the poem, especially if they picture Horace, say, mundanely bumping his head on the ceiling above his writing desk instead of amongst the lofty stars.

Also, though it is early in the *Odes* and Horace is unlikely to begin making claims about his poetic achievements, the audience must recall the unserious nature of the vast majority of the poem. And though more serious—Horace *does* want to be considered a great poet—the last stanza cannot overpower Horace’s otherwise mocking approach to other professions. Perhaps his comparisons of himself to others are meant to be taken in a similar fashion: For instance, by stating that he, as a poet, is comparable to workers in other professions, Horace may be insinuating the opposite through his use of humor. Though they are somewhat alike, Horace is no average poet. After all, he is the author of the entire scene, and he himself controls his representation, and those of others, in the poem. In this way, Horace uses humor to comment about his own skill as a poet: By deliberately equating himself with others through joking similarities, Horace is merely demonstrating that he has the ability to depict himself as such, whereas in actuality he operates at a much higher level. As a result, this bold yet self-deprecating sense of immodesty allows the audience to take Horace less than seriously, though he himself may not have actually seen himself as such.

This sort of arrogant playfulness reappears in 2.20 as Horace continues his transformation into a poet of renown in the last poem of the second Book of the *Odes*. In 2.20, which is centrally placed within the corpus and therefore occupies a position of great thematic importance, he describes this process to Maecenas, his patron, in both thoughtful and flippant terms:

Non usitata nec tenui ferar
 penna biformis per liquidum aethera
 vates, neque in terris morabor
 longius, invidiaque maior
 5 urbis relinquam. non ego pauperum
 sanguis parentum, non ego quem vocas,
 dilecte Maecenas, obibo
 nec Stygia cohibebor unda.
 iam iam residunt cruribus asperae
 10 pelles, et album mutor in alitem
 superne, nascunturque leves
 per digitos umerosque plumae.
 iam Daedaleo notior Icaro
 visam gementis litora Bosphori
 15 Syrtisque Gaetulas canorus
 ales Hyperboreosque campos.
 me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum
 Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi
 noscent Geloni, me peritus
 20 discet Hiber Rhodanique potior.
 absint inani funere neniae
 luctusque turpes et querimoniae;
 compesce clamorem ac sepulcri
 mitte supervacuos honores.

[tr. Niall Rudd]

On no common or flimsy wing shall I be
 borne aloft through the clear air, a poet of
 double shape. I shall remain no longer on
 earth, but shall leave the cities of men,
 superior to envy. I, sprung from humble
 parents, I whom you, my dear Maecenas,
 send for to be your guest, shall not die, shall
 not be confined by the waters of the Styx.

Now as I speak, rough skin forms on my
 legs; I am changing into a white bird in my
 upper part, smooth feathers sprout from
 finger to shoulder. Soon, more renowned
 than Daedalus’ Icarus, I shall visit as a
 tuneful swan the shores of the bellowing
 Bosphorus, the Gaetulian Syrtes, and the
 plains of the folk beyond the North Wind.

The Colchian shall come to know me, and
 the Dacian who pretends not to fear the
 Marsian cohorts, and, furthest of all, the
 Geloni; the Spaniard will become educated
 by reading my works, and so will he who
 drinks the Rhone. Let there be no

lamentations or any ugly expressions of grief
and mourning at my hollow funeral; restrain

all cries, and do not trouble with the empty
tribute of a tomb.

As a whole, the poem emphasizes the theme of being halfway between two states. Most obviously, this appears in Horace's lofty description of himself as a hybrid that is half-bird, half-poet (*biformis ... vates*, 2-3). Recalling 1.1, becoming a *vates* was Horace's ultimate goal (*quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres, / sublimi feriam sidera vertice*, 1.1.35-6), so *biformis* suggests that by 2.20, halfway through the *Odes*, Horace is halfway there. Horace's grand style continues as he depicts himself traveling through the air on a wing that is extraordinary (*non usitata nec tenui ferar / penna*, 1-2). If we extrapolate the avian metaphor, the wings of a bird propel its motion, so it follows that a poet would be propelled by his poetry. Thus Horace may be suggesting that his "wings" are the Books of *Odes* and that they are, in his mind, a great piece of work. Additionally, the singular sense of *penna* suggests incompleteness: Horace currently flies with only one wing. So, in order to become a complete bird, Horace puts the burden on himself to obtain that second wing by writing more *Odes* of similar quality to those in the first two Books. There is humor in this due to the fact that all of those poems would have been written by the time 2.20 was published, and it is unlikely that Horace doubted the quality of own work. For the audience, the upshot of all this is that Horace has painted a vibrant but humorously incomplete picture of himself and has suggested that there is more good poetry to come in the remainder of the *Odes*.

Soon, the audience realizes that Horace is not just talking about himself in the poem; he also makes the bold decision to embody his own reputation while still alive. This haughty sense of pride appears in the next few lines as he resolves to leave behind the earth (*neque in terris morabor / longius*, 3-4), perhaps on a path to the stars of 1.1, and proclaims himself too great even for both the positive and negative effects of envy (*invidiaque maior*, 4). Accordingly, the image the audience gets of Horace in the first stanza is quite supercilious. And, though they might expect the bragging to continue, Horace proceeds to undercut his claims in the second stanza by invoking his earthly roots. He expounds his humble background (*ego pauperum / sanguis parentum*, 5-6), his friendship with and obligation to Maecenas (*ego quem vocas, / dilecte Maecenas*, 6-7), and inability to die a human death (*non ... obibo / nec Stygia cohibebor unda*, 6-8). However, the very mention of death is incongruous with the portrayal of Horace the audience has seen thus far. Its inclusion, particularly at the end of a three-part sentence spanning birth, life, and death, suggests its inevitability and contrasts with Horace's suggestion that he and his reputation are immortal.

As mentioned, these descriptors firmly connect Horace to the earth, the domain of men, and not to the stars (cf. 1.1.35-6), the domain of great poets, birds—like the one he is claiming likeness to—and gods. The contrast in Horace's proposed termini for himself further emphasizes this contrast: The earthly *Stygia ... unda* (8) and the heavenly *liquidum aethera* (2) are polar opposites, and his human body will rest in one while his reputation may never leave the other. Also, there is contrast in his mention of his lowly background because it opposes the ultimate height of his crown achievement, completing the *Odes*. Additionally, these descriptions further

emphasize his humanness: It is impossible for him to truly leave behind the cities of mankind (*urbis relinquam*, 5) because he was born into them, stands to die in them, and while living, is loyal to a human patron. The incongruity here arises from the ambiguity of *ego* (5; 6), which refers to both Horace's person, which will die, and his fame, which may not. Thus Horace has humorously tarnished his grand, birdlike appearance: He is, at most, a mortal man with lofty aspirations to be considered something more.

The poem's first twist occurs with the stark change in topic in line 9, as *iam iam* brings the imaginary scene in 1-8 into reality. Horace turns his views from the outside world and his place in it back towards himself as he meticulously details his physical transformation (*album mutor*, 10). He notably describes his fingers and toes turning into feathers in a grotesque fashion (*nascunturque*, 11) that serves to make the strangeness of his transformation all the more apparent. This scene is, of course, ridiculous, and the specificity of the description recalls that which appears in Horace's catalogue of professions in the first poem of the *Odes* (1.1.3-28). In 1.1, over-specification was one of the devices that Horace used to help establish contrast between his work as poet and those employed in other processions; his ability to replace the audience's preconceptions with his own connoisseurial descriptions was a clear demonstration of his poetic skill. Since the main implication of this contrast was that Horace was superior to those in other lines of work, the audience might expect a similar situation in 2.20. And, not one to disappoint, Horace uses over-specification for much the same purpose here, though in a slightly different context: Though he is not stating his intention to surpass the birds—though perhaps he hopes to fly to the stars, higher than birds can—Horace is demonstrating his ability to meticulously describe a metamorphosis to impress the audience. As a result, this vivid explanation humorously heightens the disparity between Horace and the bird he claims to be; though he is certainly no bird, the fact that he can convincingly portray himself as such attests to his poetic talents.

In the fourth stanza, the humor of another lofty comparison is added as Horace suggests that, just lines after describing himself as a half-bird, he will become the *best* half-bird: West notes that Horace revered Pindar and claims in *Odes* 4.2 that anyone trying to rival him is doomed to a watery death:²⁹

Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari,
Iulle, ceratis ope Daedalea
nititur pennis vitreo daturus
nomina ponto. (*Hor. Od.* 4.2.1-4)

This is humorous in the retrospective context of 2.20, as it would suggest that Horace is the one who stands to perish by comparing his ascent to greatness with a Pindaric Icarus flight (*iam Daedaleo notior Icaro / visam*, 13-4). Part of the humor here stems from the allusion to the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, which both pays homage to Daedalus's renowned craftsmanship—similar to Horace's view of his own work on the *Odes*—and conjures up the possibility of failure. In short, he

²⁹ West (1999) 145.

compares himself to Icarus, son of Daedalus, not Daedalus, father of Icarus. West also notes that Horace uses *notior* (13) in comparing himself to Icarus instead of, say, *nobilior*. This introduces ambiguity as to the success of his endeavors since it is unclear as to whether he is well known because of success, failure, or simply because he tried so hard.³⁰

The remainder of the fourth stanza depicts Horace flying over different parts of the world, a physical representation that his hope that his reputation—and perhaps even his poetry itself—will obtain worldwide acclaim. The locations listed in grandiose terms (15-20) are the furthest boundaries of the Roman world,³¹ and Horace is effectively describing his poetic conquest of lands at the extent of Roman control and perhaps even beyond. However, this military idea, though strengthened by the mention of a cohort (*Marsae cohortis*, 18), is absurd since knowledge of high poetry is likely to be beyond the scope of barbarian intellect. Thus even though Horace's reputation might stretch thousands of miles, he pokes fun at himself because a majority of people in that domain will not even understand the value of his work.

The final stanza marks a second twist as Horace introduces a funeral scene that seemingly contrasts his immortal and unearthly depiction of himself throughout the poem. However, his funeral lacks the most important part of any funeral, the body. Instead, Horace meticulously leaves himself out of the equation: His funeral is empty (*inani funere*, 21) because he will not be there to witness it, and it entails empty honors (*sepulcri / mitte supervacuos honores*, 23-4) because he will not be there to receive them: West notes that Horace's tomb will be empty because that "swan has flown."³² In other words, Horace's reputation has already transcended human bounds, and it will not be restrained by his own human life. This suggests that Horace does not envision his reputation dying; on the contrary, the whole scene speaks to his earlier self-presentation as immortal and negates any transitory doubts that were lingering throughout it. In this sense, the poem is serious. Here, Horace is fully aware of the eminence of his *Odes*, and he is not kidding when he discusses his poetic immortality. However, one cannot overlook humorous inclusions such as *supervacuos* (24), a word that itself is exaggerated to describe the human tendency to strive for inflated goals,³³ that serve to undercut Horace's otherwise grand presentation of himself.

Accordingly, Horace's commentary about his own poetic ability comes from his portrayal of himself in the poem. He uses the flippant guise of self-deprecation to create humor that he then uses to further his own goals, namely discussing his skill. Horace is justifiably proud of his achievement and realistically expects to be famous, both in his lifetime and beyond. But the way in which he symbolizes his fame is humorously incongruous in many ways. For example, there is contrast between his humble existence and his grand aspirations, as well as between his bizarre transformation and his meticulous description of metamorphosing. These

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 345.

³² West (1999) 146.

³³ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 348.

incongruities present Horace to the audience as a poet striving along the path to greatness, in contrast with their predispositions that he might be a dreamer fancying himself a bird without any substance to support his claim. Furthermore, Horace's somewhat surprising decision to ironize his own fame serves to draw the audience back in and quell any thoughts that he is less than serious about his work; though this may also be partially due to a natural sense of humility or flippancy, Horace ironizes himself in an effort to introduce humor into the scene to more fully comment on his own prowess.

Horace's discussion of his own poetry's quality continues into the end of the third Book, the final poem in the first publication of the *Odes*. However, his point of view in 3.30 is much more clearly focused on himself than it is in 1.1 or 2.20. Nonetheless, many of the themes found in 2.20 reappear but now in a different light. For example, Horace is still humorous, and the topic of self-presentation still takes center stage:

	<p>Exegi monumentum aere perennius regalique situ pyramidum altius, quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens possit diruere aut innumerabilis</p>
<p>5 annorum series et fuga temporum. non omnis moriar, multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam: usque ego postera crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium</p>	<p>I have finished a monument more lasting than bronze, more lofty than the regal structure of the pyramids, one which neither corroding rain nor the ungovernable North Wind can ever destroy, nor the countless series of the years, nor the flight of time.</p>
<p>scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex. 10 dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium regnavit populorum, ex humili potens</p>	<p>I shall not wholly die, and a large part of me will elude the Goddess of Death. I shall continue to grow, fresh with the praise of posterity, as long as the priest climbs the Capitol with the silent virgin. I shall be spoken of where the violent Aufidus thunders and where Daunus, short of water, ruled over a country people, as one who, rising from a lowly state to a position of power, was the</p>
<p>princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos deduxisse modos. sume superbiam 15 quaesitam meritis et mihi Delphica lauro cinge volens, Melpomene, comam. [tr. Niall Rudd]</p>	<p>first to bring Aeolian verse to the tunes of Italy. Take the pride, Melpomene, that you have so well earned, and, if you would be so kind, surround my hair with Delphic bay.</p>

Unlike 2.20, which begins with a meandering comparison to a swan, 3.30 starts with a sense of certainty; that said the poem still retains several instances of humor. Instead of discussing several different professions (cf. 1.1), Horace focuses on just one in 3.30, his own. He opens with a strong verb in the perfect that grandly articulates the point that he has, by now, completed a great work (*exegi monumentum*, 1) as opposed to the incomplete sense of the future verb *ferar* in 2.20 (2.20.1). This claim is bold, but it is also defensible. And, for the audience, it presents Horace in a somewhat haughty light that persists for the majority of the poem. Next, he proceeds to describe the *Odes* in three pairs of ideas, each of which speaks to a different aspect of his accomplishment: First, the enormity of the opus is mentioned

(1-2); second, its inability to decay is emphasized (3-4); and third, Horace concludes with reference to its enduring nature (4-5). Bronze (*aere*, 1) was known for its hardness³⁴ and also invokes the thought of bronze statues, physical and long-lasting representations of great men. It is likely that Horace's mention of bronze focuses on its natural aspects, but it would not be unlike him to hint that he is worthy of a commemorative statue for his efforts. Also, in mentioning pyramids, Horace is being topical since the pyramids were of great interest in Rome after the conquest of Egypt.³⁵ They were commonly known to induce awe, but Nisbet also notes that this feeling "was combined with disapproval of their uselessness."³⁶ Nonetheless, by making these comparisons, the audience would have a thorough understanding of Horace's claims since they would have experienced both bronzes and pyramids in their daily lives.

Horace does not hesitate to continue his comparisons. He goes on to discuss his poetry's endurance against natural forces such as rain and wind (*imber edax, non Aquilo impotens*, 3). However, there is a tinge of humor here, as the forces he chooses inherently threaten the symbols of strength he has just mentioned above: Bronze corrodes when wet, and, in time, the pyramids will be reduced to loose sand by wind. However, there is a humorous timing element to his argument as well: Bronze corrodes quickly, whereas the pyramids had been standing for two millennia in Horace's time. Thus Horace introduces the idea of his reputation suffering gnawing erosion rather than a quick decline. Still, the comparison, which is briefly self-deprecating since it suggests instability in his reputation, complicates matters. But Horace quashes doubts with the third comparison that relates to the everlasting nature of his poetry. This theme (*innumerabilis / annorum series et fuga temporum*, 4-5) notably spans stanzas, suggesting the capacity of Horace's reputation to span centuries. However, the briefness of *fuga temporum* contrasts the slow tempo of the rest of the idea; sometimes, time is orderly (*series*), but often it is swift and fleeting (*fuga*). In this line, Horace is aware that time, not the wind nor rain, is his true opponent in his quest for eternal glory because it is inconsistent. As such, there is humor that stems from incongruity present in all of these comparisons.

However, Horace does not plan to let time and its effects confine his reputation. He continues with no sense of modesty even though he has just acknowledged the fact that time has power over his success: Three of the following verbs, now in the future, look towards Horace's own future: His reputation will not die (*non omnis moriar*, 6; *vitabit*, 7), shall grow (*crescam*, 8), and shall be spoken of (*dicar*, 10) for years to come. These lines, and particularly the inclusion of Libitina (7), the goddess of funerals, recall Horace's escape from human problems such as his death and funeral in 2.20, though here, escape from death has a darker tone that is out of place with the overall celebratory sense of the poem. Nisbet and Rudd note that the gate in the Roman arena through which mangled corpses and remnants of bodies were dragged after spectacles was called the *Porta Libitinensis*.³⁷ Thus

³⁴ Nisbet and Rudd 368.

³⁵ Ibid., 369.

³⁶ Ibid., 370.

³⁷ Ibid., 371.

Horace, by reassuring the audience that he will not die whole (*non omnis moriar, multaque pars mei*, 6) invokes the notion that his reputation will be mangled and his body torn to pieces in a vicious death. Though the idea of such an unpleasant death is not humorous, its incongruous placement in a poem that is otherwise celebratory is; there is also more obvious humor present in the idea that Horace plans to escape death (*vitabit Libitinam*, 7), which is an impossible task for a human but potentially feasible for one's reputation.

In either case, this violently self-deprecating reference is grotesque in a different sense than Horace's metamorphosis was in 2.20, but it is a transformation nonetheless. It also recalls the unpredictable nature of *fuga* (5) and applies it to a physical manifestation of Horace; a wild animal will not destroy his reputation, but it can certainly destroy his body. This emphasizes Horace's human nature, and in particular, it shows him to be acutely aware of death and begins to hint that he is more human and less unrealistically aspirational than we realize. Finally, the audience, who would have been familiar with the games, may have found this injection of abruptness humorous and not distasteful both because they could have related to it and also because of its contrast with the rest of the poem's solemnity.

The poem's twist in the next two lines strongly contrasts the oblique allusion to the gory scene from the arena as Horace next relates the growth of his own poetic reputation to the enduring nature of the Roman state (*crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium / scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex*, 8-9). The Capitol was the central symbol of Roman *imperium*, and the survival of the state was thought to rest on its preservation.³⁸ Additionally, the inclusion of the Pontifex Maximus and Vestal Virgin introduces the theme of religion into the poem and lends a sense of continuity to events in Rome. Horace suggests that, as long as (*dum*) the religious figures continue to climb to the Capitol, the Roman state will be sound. And, by extent, it is his hope that the literary ascent that audiences will continue to make in reading his Roman poetry, which is central to the preservation of his reputation, will similarly remain sound over time.

But Horace's reputation is not limited to just the city of Rome, or even to Italy as a whole. He recalls his humble upbringing in mentioning that he will be spoken about near the Aufidus, a river in rural Apulia in southeastern Italy, (*dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus*, 10) and in the kingdom of Daunus, a legendary king of Apulia (*et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium / regnavit populorum*, 11-12)³⁹ with the same sort of lofty treatment that he gave his travels to foreign lands in 2.20. Nonetheless, Horace extends the power of his reputation over Italy, an especially potent comparison given his recent likening of himself to Rome's *imperium* (8-9). They both, according to Horace, are conquerors but in different ways: Nisbet and Rudd also note that it was common for poets to attest to their renown in their homeland as a model for its spread throughout the rest of the world.⁴⁰ However, we again see a human side of Horace here. He does not shirk his humble upbringing (*ex humili*, 12) but instead embraces it. The usage of *humili* is particularly compelling as

³⁸ Ibid., 373.

³⁹ Ibid., 374.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 365.

it emphasizes Horace's earthly roots and contrasts his grand aspirations to conquer regions poetically.

Horace then returns to the aspirations he laid out in 1.1. Previously, he had hoped for poetic glory given the support of two Muses, Euterpe and Polyhymnia (*si neque tibus / Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia / Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton*, 1.1.32-4), whereas in 3.30, Horace invokes the aid of Melpomene (16). This is obviously a Greek reference, in line with his statement that is he the first to properly bring the essence of Greek poetry to Italy (*princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos / deduxisse modos*, 13-14). Additionally, the Muses he called on prior were those overseeing the domains of elegiac poetry and hymn, whereas Melpomene governs tragedy. This is a surprising note to end on, even for Horace, and it suggests a general softening of his proud claims. He acknowledges that his inspiration is Greek, and it is with Greek support that he has been able to begin, in 1.1, and end, in 3.30, his poetic journey. This is ultimately capped by another allusion to a work of Pindar—this time his last *Olympian* ode—much as was the case in 2.20. But here, in the final line of the final poem of the final Book of the *Odes*, Horace asks a Muse to place the laurel which was given to athletic victors on his head (*lauro cinge volens, Melpomene, comam*, 16) to signify his crown achievement in writing the *Odes* while hearkening back to Pindar. Now, if the audience recalls the first question posed in the *Odes* as to whether Horace is now a poet of similar caliber to the Greeks (cf. 1.1.35-6), the answer is certainly “Yes.”

However, this does not mean that the audience must finally take Horace's words at face value. His descriptions of events in 3.30 are pompous to the extent that they are self-deprecating, and his discussions of his own greatness and lofty and obscure references are grand enough to undercut his claims of seriousness. Surely Horace was proud of his achievement, but, as has been shown in a wide variety of poems, it is unlike him to say almost anything about himself without poking fun at himself at the same time. And, for the audience, this seemingly serious approach may have been entirely humorous: West notes that the style of the poem invokes Augustan themes,⁴¹ which are too grand even for Horace, and as such, it is possible the whole poem is a deliberate exaggeration of his achievement in completing the *Odes* that is intended to have a humorous effect.

Nonetheless, the role of humor in Horace's poems that deal with his poetry is important. Without slight jabs at himself, Horace's otherwise serious discussion of his own greatness would be insincere; simply stating one's own greatness is not a precursor to achieving it, unlike tactfully demonstrating such greatness through careful construction of several detailed personas in a larger body of work. Thus, through his use of flippant humor and surprising twists, Horace is able to comment about his poetic talents in a meaningful and decidedly persuasive fashion.

In sum, humor is a mostly latent force within and between poems in the first three Books of Horace's *Odes*. As such, since it does not always feature prominently, the instances in which it does appear are worth investigating in an effort to study the reasons behind its usage. For the purpose of this thesis, I define humor as the

⁴¹ West (2002) 267.

result of a surprising twist in a scene about which an audience already has preconceptions. The unexpected nature of this twist may itself be humorous, and it also often allows the author to comment on the scenario being depicted in ways that are particularly informative for the audience. This commentary comes in many forms that vary widely across different types of poems. For example, Horace often uses humor—brought about through unexpected twists—to evoke reflection on the roles lovers play in relationships in his love poems. This is done mostly through implied comments about role reversals and social differences between people. However, humor plays a different role in the convivial poems; in these, it facilitates Horace's commentary on wine's influence over people, a process that occurs mostly as a result of wine's contributions to power dynamics, people's tendency to self-reflect, and intoxication. Finally, humor helps Horace portray himself in poems centrally concerned with his own poetry. And, while the pictures he paints of himself are not always serious—in fact they are often the opposite—the combined effects of humor and these poems' significant positions within the *Odes* enable Horace to more fully discuss his work, aspirations, and legacy. When aggregated, it is with an understanding of these and other flavors of humor that we can begin to more fully understand the reasons underlying Horace's selective usage of humor within the *Odes*.

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