

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### A NOTE ON HORACE'S *HYMN TO MERCURY* (ODES 1. 10)

I should like in this note to call attention to an overlooked aspect of the plan of Horace's *Hymn to Mercury* (Odes 1. 10). I present it only as a footnote to Fraenkel's characteristically tactful and illuminating treatment of the Hymn.<sup>1</sup> For my present purpose, I shall generally accept Fraenkel's placement of the major division of the poem's five stanzas between the second and third; although when the thematic pattern requires, I shall treat as a unit all the stanzas (2-5) linked by the anaphora of *tu*. This ambiguity arises because the second stanza is transitional, in some respects linked with the introductory stanza, in some with the stanzas which follow it. In either case, my attention will be focused on the second part of the poem, whichever way it is defined. Fraenkel writes: "The first two stanzas contain an announcement of the theme of the hymn; here the abilities of the god, his ἀρεταί, as well as his main achievements are broadly surveyed. The remaining three stanzas are each separated from one another by a full stop, and in thought too, each of them is complete and self-contained."<sup>2</sup> He then further distinguishes within the last three stanzas two (3-4) which refer to events in the god's life, and one (5) which refers to one of his general functions. This latter distinction can be found in the poem; but, as will become clear, I believe that to give it major emphasis breaks up what the poet treats, in more important respects, as a continuous sequence. The problem here is one that often confronts us when we face the paratactic structure which characterizes many Horatian odes: what is the unifying principle which governs the selection and sequence of the elements that compose the whole? I shall try in what follows to supply part of the answer for the Hymn to Mercury.

Let me begin by treating briefly two principles governing the disposition of the material

in the second half of the poem, principles which Fraenkel touches on without working out their full extent and continuity. Then I will turn to a third, which I believe has not been observed.

1. The material is arranged according to a sequence of mood. The mood rises to comedy in stanza three, shifts to the seriousness of a grave and dangerous mission in stanza four, and passes in turn into the solemn, religious calm of the close. The automatic tendency to describe mood in terms of light and darkness is here no more than direct reporting: the first episode occurs in the midst of day, the second in a night lit only by hostile fires, the last in the universal gloom of the underworld. There is no discontinuity in this sequence, and the solemn final stanza is the perfect culmination of the movement initiated in stanzas three and four. Horace, here as elsewhere, is no less expert than Vergil in the "musical" manipulation of mood.

2. The material is arranged chronologically. This principle reaches back in part to the second stanza, which refers to the invention of the lyre and prepares for the account of the theft of Apollo's cattle and quiver in stanza three, both adventures of Mercury's first day. The fourth stanza then treats an act of the god in his later, Homeric period; and the fifth, an activity which is presented as occupying the god in the present (*reponis*, 18; *coerces*, 19). This chronological emphasis accords with the Hymn's encomiastic purpose, for it underlines the fact that the god's praiseworthy activity has extended continuously throughout the whole of his life.

3. There is a third principle of selection and sequence at work in these stanzas; it is perhaps the one most fundamentally governed by the Hymn's formal purpose, which is to render the god adequate praise. The activities of Mercury

1. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 161-66.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

in the last three stanzas (and here again, the principle in part reaches back to the second stanza) are ordered according to a standard division of the universe into three realms—heaven, earth, and the underworld—inhabited respectively by the higher gods, men, and the lower gods and the dead. This is a categorization that Horace uses elsewhere to convey an impression of his subject's universal range.<sup>3</sup> In *Odes* 1. 34, Jupiter's thunderbolt is represented as affecting the sky (*per purum*, 7), the earth, here divided into the land (*tellus*, 9) and the waters (*flumina*, 9) to increase the impression of scope, and the underworld ("Styx et invisi horrida Taenari / sedes," 10–11). To this vertical division of the universe, running from top to bottom, Horace adds that the thunderbolt shook the world throughout its horizontal dimension (*Atlanteusque finis*, 11) as well.<sup>4</sup> By tracing its effect through each of the three realms, Horace persuades us of the tremendous magnitude of the thunderbolt's power. In the Hymn to Mercury, the same division of the universe, running from top to bottom, is turned to the purposes of praise, although in accordance with the needs of the Hymn, the three realms are here designated not by their geographical features but by their inhabitants. In the third stanza, Mercury delights the Olympian Apollo; the god's services to the Olympians are foreshadowed in stanza two ("magni Iovis et deorum / nuntium," 5–6). In the fourth stanza, he performs a service in the realm of men. In the fifth stanza,

he conducts his duties among the dead. To underline the significance of this plan, Horace concludes his description of the universal range of Mercury's praiseworthy acts with an expression of the commensurately universal delight and gratitude which he inspires. Mercury is "superis deorum / gratus et imis" (19–20). For the sake of brevity, Horace here replaces the triple division of the universe by a doublet, in which the range of Mercury's praise is marked out in terms of its upper and lower limits; once again, the elements run from the top of the universe to the bottom, recapitulating the movement of the earlier stanzas. It is important to observe that Horace heightens this final compliment by focusing on the divine participants in the delight and gratitude duly felt toward Mercury. This emphasis does not, however, detract from the universal scope of the praise, if only because the fact of human delight in the god is amply demonstrated by the Hymn itself.

I hope that the recognition of the plan which underlies its last three—in part, its last four—stanzas may help us read the Hymn with somewhat greater obedience to Horace's intention; and that, so read, the poem may enhance our delight not only in the "eloquent" god but in the eloquent poet, who is able in three brief stanzas to span the entire universe with praise.

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3. In addition to *Odes* 1. 34, compare *Odes* 3. 4. 41–48, where the list is arranged differently, but contains the same elements (with some additions), likewise employed to create an impression of universal scope. For a Greek poem which is arranged in accordance with the same division of the universe one may compare Pindar's *Olympian* 14, which opens with a scene in heaven, passes to a scene on earth, and closes with a scene in Hades; all the universe is implicated in the glory and praise of Asopichus, as here in the glory and praise of Mercury.

4. This would be equally true whether one accepts the view of L. Müller, reported by R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* (Oxford, 1970), *ad loc.*, that "Horace was referring to the Atlantic Ocean, the [watery] boundary of the world," or their own view that Atlas here means the western portion of the Atlas range, and represents "the boundary of the continental world [italics mine]."

#### A NOTE ON PETRONIUS SAT. 31. 2

In 1929 Moses Hadas suggested in a fascinating, far-reaching, and learned article that Oriental (we should now say Near Eastern)

elements were much in evidence in Petronius.<sup>1</sup> This bold and original thesis was almost totally ignored by Petronian scholars.<sup>2</sup> Until

1. "Oriental Elements in Petronius," *AJP*, L (1929), 378–85.

2. Thus, Hadas' article, which bears on numerous passages in the *Satyricon*, does not seem to be mentioned anywhere in