

MITTE SECTARI, ROSA QUO LOCORUM SERA MORETUR:
TIME AND NATURE IN HORACE'S ODES

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HORACE'S poetry has often been examined for its symbols, reifications of ideas too elusive to be articulated in the language available to the poet. One of his most interesting and evocative symbols is the rose.¹ This flower is often linked to other sympotic elements in Horace's poetry such as wine, music, women, and incense,² but Horace embeds the rose in a larger imaginative context by making it a symbol of human interchange and by adding references to death, the passage of time, and seasonal cycles.³ Horace uses the elements of a party or feast, not for any qualities inherent in them and important in themselves, but because they symbolize for him the correspondences between the cycles of human and of natural life. He invites his readers to contemplate less the smell of a rose or the bouquet of a Falernian wine than their own place in the larger, natural universe.

I

I would like in this paper to focus on the place of the rose in Horace's poetry. The rose is an important metaphor for human cycles and activities, and it suggests, as wine often does, life's impermanence and the need for humans to make the most of the present moment.⁴ Although both wine and

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1. For a recent study of the importance of the rose as a symbol in postclassical literature, see R. F. Fleissner, *A Rose by Another Name: A Survey of Literary Flora from Shakespeare to Eco* (West Cornwall, Ct., 1989). A brief survey of the various uses of the rose indicates its versatility and complexity. It has symbolized love (passionate and platonic), brevity of life, human fragility and mortality, danger, magnificence, and rebirth (pp. xix–xx).

2. For poems containing some or all of these elements, see *Carm.* 1.36, 2.3, 2.7, 2.11, 3.8, 3.15, 3.19, 3.29.

3. See G. Williams' discussion of the Roman poets' use of thematic and verbal complexes and of ideas as semantic units in *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry* (New Haven, 1980), pp. ix–x. O. Murray, "Symposium and Genre in the Poetry of Horace," *JRS* 75 (1985): 39–50, especially 49–50, discusses the importance of the sympotic vision for Horace's poetry; it becomes, he says, "a way of life for poet and patron . . . creating the possibility of a genuine *amicitia*." He goes on to say that "sympotic poetry offers a mode of expressing the meaning of a relationship, not a mask to disguise it"; also, idem, "Sympotic History" in *Sympotica: a Symposium on the 'Symposion'*, ed. O. Murray (Oxford, 1990), pp. 3–13; J. D'Arms, "The Roman *Convivium* and the Idea of Equality," *Sympotica*, pp. 308–20.

4. Steele Commager has done a fine analysis of the symbolic importance of wine for Horace's poetry. See S. Commager, "The Function of Wine in Horace's Odes," *TAPA* 88 (1957): 68–80. As with the rose, wine is important for its effect on the drinker more than for its own properties. It is more commonly labelled *oblivioso* (*Carm.* 2.7.21), *libera* (*Ars.P.* 85) or *languidiora* (*Carm.* 3.21.8) than *lene* (*Carm.* 3.29.2).

roses are “recurrent life-images,” however, there are interesting differences in the way the two symbols are used.⁵ One difference between them is that, although both contain a reminder of the fleeting present and the uncertain future, roses are more ephemeral than wine, which can be kept, aged, and stored for the next generation. Another difference is that, whereas wine is in its very essence no longer a simple form of nature but an artefact of culture and thus something that fits naturally into human settings, the rose can be envisioned as a pure product of nature and apart from its cultivated state (the dialectic between the natural and the cultivated or acculturated rose will be discussed below). The rose initially belongs to nature, and, even when it is appropriated by man and made part of a garland, a cushion, a sachet, or a bed, it still retains its natural appearance and odor and is not transformed into a whole new entity. Wine exists only in culture; roses, although they are cultivated and can be changed into a different substance (perfume), are natural in form. The rose therefore is always in suspension between the human and the natural worlds.

Horace focuses often on nature in his poetry, but less on nature for its own sake than on what man does to nature, on the interaction of human and natural life, and on what nature symbolizes for man. The wild or cultivated rose as a horticultural specimen holds no fascination for Horace unless it is set in a cultural context. Thus Horace’s roses are always either themselves accompanied by adjectives that lend them symbolic meaning, closely joined with other substantives that have loaded modifiers, or embedded in a context that itself extends beyond the simple situation depicted in the poem. On the four occasions on which *rosa* has a modifier in the *Odes*, only once is there a word that describes a characteristic of the flower, here its color: *puniceae* (4.10.4).⁶ The other three adjectives used to describe *rosa*, *multa* (1.5.1), *sera* (1.38.3), and *amoenae* (2.3.14), have no reference to any inherent quality of the rose such as the color or smell,⁷ rather, they refer to the cultural world in which the rose is embedded, and they add characteristics to the flower that are borrowed from human nature: complexity and luxuriance (*multa*), elusiveness (*sera*), ephemerality (*amoenae*).

More commonly, *rosa* is itself presented in an oddly stark manner, bearing no modifiers that might qualify it with any secondary characteristics. When this is the case, however, *rosa* is invariably paired with other like words from nature that do bear qualifiers, and these adjectives influence our perception not only of the nouns to which they are attached but also of *rosa*, which hovers on the periphery. Thus *rosae* in *Carmen* 1.36.15 is

5. See M. Owen Lee, “Horace, *Odes* I, 38: Thirst for Life,” *AJP* 86 (1965): 279.

6. In *Carm.* 3.15.15, the word *purpureus* modifies *flos* which has *rosae* as a defining genitive. The word *rosa* is used nine times in Horace’s works and only in the *Carmina* (1.5.1, 1.36.15, 1.38.3, 2.3.14, 2.11.14, 3.15.15, 3.19.22, 3.29.3, 4.10.4). *Roseus* is used once (also in the *Carmina*, 1.13.2).

7. Apparently the roses of antiquity (unlike our modern roses) were distinguished for their strong smell rather than their visual beauty. Oddly Horace does not ever mention the smell of the rose. According to T. Christopher in his book *In Search of Lost Roses* (New York, 1989), an interesting historical study of roses by a horticulturist and ex-classicist, Greek and Roman roses were very different from our roses today in all respects.

joined with *vivax apium* and *breve lilium* (16), and the words *vivax* and *breve* inscribe *rosa* with a note of temporality. The third and most frequent presentation of *rosa* is its placement in a broader semantic or visual context that includes other substantives that share common qualities with the rose. The objects linked to the rose lend to it sensory and cultural connotations that attach to it a rich semantic field.

The symbol of the rose presented to Horace a problem in poetic representation. When we visualize a "rose," we imagine a perfect bloom isolated in nature, its color perhaps a deep red, its blooms full, its fragrance intense. We do not see its potential for fading quickly. But there can be no such thing as a perfect or static or natural rose, a rose without a cultural context.⁸ We cannot conjure up merely the name or even simply an image without qualifying it. And any qualifier invests the image with human emotions and values, puts the rose in a cultural context, and changes the static perfection of the image.

Horace certainly realized that once the rose was put in a cultural context, it ceased to function as the Platonic idea of beauty. Indeed, even when the rose is envisioned as a part of nature, it embodies the impossibility of perfection in its constant potential for change, its combination of soft beauty and prickly thorns, and the proximity of full bloom to decay and death. The poet in Horace would like to find a pure object to symbolize the aim of our desire; the realist in Horace knows that such a pure object does not exist.⁹ Horace seeks to reassure himself and his friends that such enduring symbols of the unchanging present do exist, but, each time he makes this claim, he almost reluctantly warns against the tide of change and decay, and he cautions that human emotion cannot impede the process of natural change by pretending that such symbols exist.

The poet's ambivalence produces a dual presentation of the rose as, on the one hand, a product of nature—simple, unadorned, unqualified, set apart—and, on the other, a very complex symbol that adopts new meaning from the words around it and interacts with Horace's themes to become one of his controlling metaphors. In its poetic and cultural contexts, the rose is most often associated with decadence, luxury, banquets, wealth, and excess, and thus it stands in opposition to the simplicity it represents

8. We might think here of the nominalist definition of the rose given by Bernard of Clairvaux: "stat rosa pristina nomine; nomina nuda tenemus" (a statement now given wide circulation by Umberto Eco in *The Name of the Rose*, trans. Wm. Weaver [New York, 1983], p. 502). Cf. also the observation of Suarez: "scientia rosae ad ipsam rosam terminari dicitur obiective, quamvis ipsa rosa non existit." I would like to thank C. Rubino for calling my attention to this quote. See his review of T. Coletti, *Naming the Rose: Eco, Medieval Signs, and Modern Theory* (Ithaca, 1988) in *Italica* 67 (1990): 385–88 and his article "The Invisible Worm: Ancients and Moderns in *The Name of the Rose*," *SubStance* 47 (1985): 54–63.

9. See the interesting remark on Horace's double presentation of the rose by B. Brophy, who relates how she felt betrayed by Hor. *Carm.* 1.38.3–4. She mistranslated *mitte sectari* as "seek to send" and thus interpreted the lines as a "dying, artistically-aristocratic command to pursue last beauties" that became a "talisman" for her. On discovering the correct translation, she felt disillusioned by Horace, who had created this splendid image only to "negative it with a puritanical, but not a passionately puritanical, prohibition" (*Arion* 9 [1970]: 128–29, cited by Wm. Fitzgerald in "Horace, Pleasure and the Text," *Arethusa* 22 [1989]: 90, n. 17).

in its natural form. In each context in which it occurs, the idea of temporality is introduced. The perfection embodied in the rose implies always the possibility of imperfection and thus hints at time passing even as it symbolizes an enduring present. The rose is a living, visual protest against what it abstractly implies: death and change.

II

In many of Horace's monitory poems, he uses the rose as a symbol of potentially changeable beauty and perfection. I will examine several of the contexts in which the rose appears in order to demonstrate how it functions as a complex symbol of natural and human processes and then look at the use of the rose in some of Horace's Greek models and in Vergil.

The first *rosa* of the *Odes* appears in the Pyrrha Ode, 1.5, a poem whose spare elegance and colorful, emotional undertones clash and collide, leaving the tone of the poem unclear. The poem opens with a description of a luxuriant, idealized scene (1.5.1–3):¹⁰

Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa
perfusus liquidis urget odoribus
grato, Pyrrha, sub antro?¹¹

What slender youth sprinkled with fragrant perfumes / now makes love to you, Pyrrha,
on a bed of roses / in some pleasant cave?

The rose, placed at the end of line 1, is fleeting and elusive, and it is a complex evocation of opposites. A careful placement of words leads us into the line with *multa*, profuse, and *gracilis*, slender and delicate (and, by implication, simple and sparse), juxtaposed. These words set the tone. *Te* and *puer* introduce us to the two lovers together, with the referents of the two opening adjectives still left unclear. Finally, the odd, alternating mono- and disyllabic, lilting rhythm ends the line with *rosa*. The profuseness and luxury of the setting, thus far indicated by *multa in rosa*, is further reinforced by *perfusus liquidis odoribus* (2) and *grato sub antro* (3). But another tone prevails against the luxuriance, one of delicacy, grace, and fragility, introduced by *gracilis*, the central word of line 1, and reinforced by the choice of simple, elegant words and rhythm. All of these contending voices come to a climax in the phrase *simplex munditiis* (5), a perfect summation.

The word *rosa* in line 1 picks up and repeats the soft “s” sounds from *quis* and *gracilis* (continued in line 2), thus becoming in sound as well as in meaning an integral part of the dominant motif and symbolizing luxury

10. See the description of *Carm.* 1.5 by D. Porter: “[Horace] escapes into the exquisite artificialities of the Alexandrian love lyric, into a world of impossibly beautiful women in perfumed grottoes, a world as glittering as glass—and as fragile, as distanced from everyday realities in Horace’s time as it is in our own” (*Horace’s Poetic Journey: a Reading of Odes 1–3* [Princeton, 1987], p. 60).

11. The text I have used throughout is E. Wickham and H. W. Garrod, eds., *Q. Horati Flacci Opera*² (Oxford, 1901).

and extravagance. But it is also linked with the opposing ideas of restraint and simplicity present in *gracilis* (1) and *religas* (4, "binding back"),¹² and culminating in *simplex* (5), and it operates on a whole continuum of meanings, finding alliances with sets of opposites.

The rose in *Carmen* 1.5 plays a key role, embodying the poem's important themes and exemplifying its double layers of meaning. First, the rose is stark, set off in its line, far-separated from its modifier, yet it is also embedded in a luxuriant context. So too the poem is short, seemingly artless in its entirety but elegant in its details, which show the artlessness to be an illusion. The phrase *simplex munditiis* (5) perfectly defines the double nature of the poem. Second, the beauty of the rose is illusionary; it holds within it imminent decay and death. This characteristic of the rose parallels the illusion created by the Ode, which undercuts the appealing nature of the sensuous beauty presented in stanza one in both implicit and explicit ways. Implicitly, the language in stanza three emphasizes the illusionary nature of the situation: *credulus* (9), *sperat* (11), *nescius* (11), and *fallacis* (12). The *puer* believes Pyrrha, whose very name, "Fiery," gives clues to her character, to be all golden, loving, and passionate, but, as Horace, now retired from such desperate youthful follies, points out, in his maturer years and wisdom, such perfection does not exist. The poet also explicitly rejects love and its dubious pleasures in the final stanza (13–16).

The third and most important similarity between the rose and *Carmen* 1.5 lies in the notions of temporality and ephemerality that are implicit in both. The rose by its very nature exemplifies change and potential decay; so too the things that the youth thought were forever (*semper, semper*, 10) prove to be fleeting and in the past for Horace (13–16). The poet has already introduced this idea in the preceding poem, 1.4, *Solvitur acris hiems*. Here he shows winter turning to spring, not, as it turns out, a positive change, since this is one of the many cyclical progressions that lead ultimately to death: "vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam" ("the brief sum of life invalidates longterm hopes," 15).¹³

Thus the rose that appears so fleetingly and innocently in line 1 of the Pyrrha Ode bears a heavy burden of meaning in the poem, and it symbolizes many of the important themes that it will echo in subsequent poems.

Almost the same set of ideas appears again in one of Horace's simplest, most elegant poems, 1.38, the epilogue to Book 1:

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus,
displicent nexae philyra coronae;
mitte sectari, rosa quo locorum
sera moretur.
simplici myrto nihil allabores

5

12. For the meaning of *religas*, see D. West, *Reading Horace* (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 105–7. He tentatively suggests "unbind" as a translation for *religas* rather than "bind back," but he seems uneasy with this solution to the problem of fitting together the actions in *urget* (2) and *religas*.

13. For a discussion of *Carm.* 1.4 and 1.5 as a pair of poems and of the importance of seeing the poems in a wider context, see Porter, *Horace's Poetic Journey*, pp. 59–60; M. Santirocco, *Unity and Design in Horace's Odes* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), pp. 19–34.

sedulus curo: neque te ministrum
 dedecet myrtus neque me sub arta
 vite bibentem.

I scorn these Persian preciosities, boy— / wreaths bound with linden bark. / Stop chasing after the place where the late rose lingers on. / It is misplaced zeal to elaborate / on simple myrtle. Here under trellised vines / myrtle is correct both for me drinking, / you pouring.

This poem seems to be a reply to the preceding Ode, 1.37, which begins with a resounding exhortation, *nunc est bibendum* (1) and focuses on the present. Like *Carmen* 1.37, *Carmen* 1.38 encourages us to drink wine but in a calmer vein (*sub arta vite bibentem*, 7–8) and with admonishments not to chase the elusive rose.¹⁴ The adonics closing the two stanzas of the poem, *sera moretur* (4) and *vite bibentem* (8), reinforce the tension between the two often linked symbols of life: flowers and wine.

Another fundamental contrast between simplicity, which is privileged by Horace, and luxury, so contemptuously dismissed in line 1, is given clear expression at the beginning of each of the two stanzas: *Persicos odi, puer, apparatus* (1); *simplici myrto nihil allabores / sedulus curo* (5–6). In a poem that is filled with negative words, only the phrase *simplici myrto* (5) strikes a positive note. Yet, as in 1.5, the message is muddled and obscured by the use of sensuous sounds so that Horace's words counsel one thing for our minds while our emotions are teased in the opposite direction.¹⁵

In the midst of this confusion, Horace counsels his slave to “stop chasing after the place where the late rose lingers on” (3–4).¹⁶ The placement of *sera* as a predicate adjective in the dangling adonic of the Sapphic strophe elegantly emphasizes the delaying action and the elusiveness of the rose. The temporal aspect so important in Horace's poetry and so often connected with nature in general and with the rose in particular is located here in the aggressive action of the verb *sectari* (3), the adjective *sera* (4), and the verb *moretur* (4). *Serus*, related to Latin *series* (a series, chain, sequence) and *sero* (to plait, join, bind together) and to Sanskrit *sarat* (thread), means long and drawn-out over time; perhaps we might think of the thread of Fate that is played out by the Moirae until our death.

Editors have argued over just what Horace has in mind in the phrase *rosa sera*, but the botanical details are irrelevant (although Horace must have known enough about roses to understand that, in his country, they bloom only once and probably only in early spring).¹⁷ The rose is chosen

14. See Lee, “*Odes* I, 38,” p. 278.

15. See S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven, 1962), p. 117: “Horace's formal position [in *Carm.* 1.5] is imperiled by an imaginative attachment to what he rejects. The exaggerated language of his repudiation . . . itself tends to devalue it.”

16. Wm. Fitzgerald argues that, in his negative command to his slave here, Horace actually preserves the rose as an aesthetic object. In forbidding the slave to search for it, Horace lays claim himself to the search for the elusive object (“Horace, Pleasure and the Text,” pp. 89–90).

17. Roses in Italy tended to be spring flowers and to be once-blooming; they also had the shortest growing season of any flower. Lawrence Richardson, jr, however, in a private communication, has indicated that he thinks that roses could have bloomed well into the late fall or early winter in such a mild climate. The famous remontant roses of Paestum that bloomed in the spring and again in the fall were apparently unique. Vergil refers to them in

rather than any other flower because it, having the shortest season of any flower and maintaining its peak for the briefest time, symbolizes the most elusive object of our desire, the object we foolishly chase only to be disappointed and never fulfilled.¹⁸ There is no *rosa sera*—or perhaps only one¹⁹—and thus it is the ultimate luxury because it is unattainable. It represents a future we cannot reach and, most important for this poet, should not try to reach.

The qualifying adjective *sera* used in 1.38, like *multa* in 1.5.1, points less to a characteristic of the rose than to the cultural and human environment in which it is used as a symbol.²⁰ It signifies in 1.38 the folly of striving after something in the past or future and the urgency of accepting the only time truly available to us: the present moment. Horace's *Odes* are punctuated by warnings against worrying about the future,²¹ trying to hold onto the past,²² or denying the passage of time.²³ None of these activities suits the cycles of nature and man; none accords with Horace's concern with decorum, which applies to both nature and humans. Horace urges his readers here and elsewhere to be accommodating, accepting of natural change, and not rigid; his sternest accusations, as Commager points out, are words such as "forever," "always," and "delay."²⁴ In addition, the late rose symbolizes the *recherché* and exotic poetic subjects and styles that Horace avoids in favor of the familiar and the present, here exemplified by the myrtle.²⁵

Elsewhere in the *Odes* the rose is also emblematic of Horace's abiding concern with temporality. In contexts outside of 1.38, however, *rosa* usually appears without a temporal modifier, standing alone, unqualified, and set in a temporal context only by the words around it. In 1.36.10–20, one of

G. 4.119: *biferique rosaria Paesti*. Shakespeare alludes to the rare and unnatural winter roses in *Love's Labour's Lost* (1.1.105–7): "At Christmas I no more desire a rose / than wish a snow in May's new-fangled shows; / but like of each thing that in season grows." The Romans in their quest for the exotic and the unnatural succeeded in circumventing the horticultural problems of once-blooming and brief roses by importing them (mainly from Egypt) and thus ensuring a supply of roses for parties and chaplets over extended periods of the year. See Christopher, *Lost Roses*, pp. 119–23; Theophr. *Hist. Pl.* 6.8.2; Pliny *HN* 21.10.16–20, *Cic. Verr.* 5.27, *Colum.* 12.28.3. The winter rose was rare and therefore a symbol of luxury; see K. J. Reckford, *Horace* (New York, 1969), p. 14; A. W. Verrall, *Studies Literary and Historical in the Odes of Horace* (London, 1884), pp. 34–36, 93 (where he says that this must be a late autumn rose).

18. Compare Sappho's famous apple poem (frag. 105a L.P.); see A. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 26–29.

19. See note 17 above.

20. *Carm.* 1.38, although brief, can be interpreted in a number of different ways and is given significance by its closing position in the book. Fraenkel lays great importance on its position and interprets it as a reference to the artistic creed set forth implicitly in Book 1 (*Horace* [Oxford, 1957], pp. 298–99). For a different (and, in my mind, wrong) view, cf. Nisbet and Hubbard, who claim that "Horace's ode has been the victim of symbolic interpretation." They find fault in particular with Pasquali and Fraenkel for reading more into the poem than they feel is there, and they question whether the position of the poem in the book adds meaning to the poem (*A Commentary on Horace, "Odes" Book I* [Oxford, 1970], pp. 422–23).

21. See e.g., *Carm.* 1.11 ("carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero," 8), 2.16.25–32 ("laetus in praesens animus quod ultra est / oderit curare," 25–26), 3.29.29–48 ("quod adest memento / componere aequus," 32–33).

22. See, e.g., *Carm.* 1.23.11–12 and *passim*.

23. See, e.g., *Carm.* 3.15.

24. Commager, *Odes*, pp. 281–82.

25. See G. Davis, *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 118–26, esp. 123–26. Davis sees *Carm.* 1.38 as a metaphorical statement of Horace's aesthetic principle.

a large number of party and thanksgiving odes, Horace orders up the usual banquet accompaniments: wine, dancers, women, flowers, and the rose:

| | |
|--|----|
| Cressa ne careat pulchra dies nota, | 10 |
| neu promptae modus amphorae, | |
| neu morem in Salium sit requies pedum, | |
| neu multi Damalis meri | |
| Bassum Threicia vincat amystide, | |
| neu desint epulis rosae | 15 |
| neu vivax apium neu breve lilium. | |
| omnes in Damalin putris | |
| deponent oculos, nec Damalis novo | |
| divelletur adultero | |
| lascivis hederis ambitiosior. | 20 |

So chalk it up against this blessed day— / don't ration the wine jugs, / don't rest your feet from the dance of Mars, / and may our vinous Damalis not beat / Bassus at Thracian "drinking-without-taking-breath," / and let our feast lack neither roses nor lingering parsley nor passing lilies. / All shall cast their swooning / eyes on Damalis, but Damalis will not be torn / from her love to whom / she clings more close than doting ivy.

The note of urgency is struck early in the poem with *promptae* (11) and *neu . . . sit requies* (12). Then appear the flora: *vivax apium*, *breve lilium* (16) and *lascivis hederis ambitiosior* (20).²⁶ *Rosae* in line 15 is colored by the adjectives assigned to the other flowers nearby: the parsley is "enduring" and the lilies "short-lived"; even the ivy at the end is grasping or clutching (*ambitiosus*). All of these adjectives, especially *lascivis* (20), describe the people attending the party more than the flowers they use. The flowers are simply reminders, like the death's head, that we must be aware of time's passing, but not therefore make the mistake of trying to stop time or seek a timeless perfection that does not exist. The importance of a correct awareness of time is reemphasized at the beginning of the next poem, 1.37, where the repetition of *nunc* in lines 1–2, contrasted with the rejected *ante-hac* in line 5, reinforces the idea that the time to celebrate is now.

Carmen 2.3 is addressed to the dubious Dellius, most notable for his indecision during the civil wars. Horace uses him as an exemplum for the ethical precept to maintain equanimity and enjoy life now since death is inevitable (1–4):

aequam memento rebus in arduis
servare mentem, non secus in bonis
ab insolenti temperatam
laetitia, moriture Delli

Dellius, all must die: be sure to retain / an equable mind in vexation / avoiding also in-temperate joy / at advantages gained.

26. We should think of *apium* as a flowering herb and not as our contemporary celery plant. For a discussion of what plant *apium* is (celery or parsley), see Nisbet and Hubbard, "*Odes*" Book 1, pp. 405–6; J. André, *Lexique des termes de botanique en latin* (Paris, 1956), p. 35. Kiessling-Heinze oppose *breve lilium* to "immergrünen (*vivax*) Eppich" (= celery) (A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, eds., *Q. Horatius Flaccus, "Oden" und "Epoden"* [Dublin, 1968], ad loc.).

Horace recommends the standard prescription for achieving this state of mind: an afternoon in the country and a party. The setting is laid in stanza three, where, after counseling Dellius to find a *locus amoenus*, Horace asks (9–12):

quo pinus ingens albaque populus
umbram hospitalem consociare amant
ramis? quid obliquo laborat
lympha fugax trepidare rivo?

With whom do pines and silvery poplars / share their hospitable shade? / Why does run-away water / tremble in winding streams?

The picture given belongs less to physical nature than to human nature; the words in this passage describe as much the humans who enjoy such aspects of nature as the trees and rivers themselves (*consociare amant*, 10; *laborat*, 11; *fugax*, *trepidare*, 12).²⁷ The portrayal of the natural world in lines 11–12 is somewhat disturbing, and, by the time we move into the party invitation in stanza four, the world of nature seems less inviting to humans than it was in lines 6–7. We are thus prepared for the unsettling note introduced in lines 13–16:

huc vina et unguenta et nimium brevis
flores amoenae ferre iube rosae,
dum res et aetas et sororum
fila trium patiuntur atra.

Command all perfumes, wines / and the too brief spell of the rose / while affairs and times / and the Fates' black thread allow.

The rose is *amoena*, but the accompanying description of its blooms as *nimum brevis* once more imparts a tone of moral censure to an impersonal world of nature that knows nothing of the human excess implied in *nimum*. Time is a central theme here, first in the evergreen in line 9, then in the image of flowing water in lines 11–12, and finally in the brevity of the rose.²⁸ The brevity of the rose petals makes sense only in a human context; they remind us that our lives are too brief in passing before our eyes.²⁹ The implications of death in this phrase are made explicit in lines 15–16, where Horace, in one of his several *dum* clauses, warns Dellius that we are only here at the behest of the Fates and nature (“*res et aetas et sororum / fila trium patiuntur atra*”). The remainder of the poem, with its

27. For other uses of *labor* as applied to human life, see *Carm.* 1.7.18, *Sat.* 2.6.21; for *fugio* and *fugax*, see *Carm.* 1.11.7, 2.11.5, 2.14.1, 3.29.48; for *trepido*, see *Carm.* 2.4.23, 2.11.4, 3.29.32. Reckford, *Horace*, p. 94, sees nature in *Carm.* 2.3 as providing “an object lesson” for man: the companionship of the pine and the poplar, the rushing brook. But while the various parts of nature may furnish lessons to us, we should not read into nature human emotions.

28. On the importance of time here and elsewhere in Horace, see C. Witke, “Questions and Answers in Horace *Odes* 2.3,” *CP* 61 (1966): 250–52. Witke discusses the importance of the evergreen pine and the deciduous poplar, pointing to other Odes in which Horace uses this contrast of cyclic and non-cyclic (1.9, 3.13). He suggests that trees and brook here are, like humans, affected by time in their rushing and “love of conjoining” and that these images provide lessons to Dellius to use time wisely and correctly.

29. See Commager, *Odes*, p. 285, who says that “*nimum*, the habitual accusation of human excess, is now turned against nature.”

future verbs (*cedes, cedes*, 17, 19) and grim images of Hades is unambiguously pessimistic,³⁰ but the inviting picture of nature early in the poem and the always compelling figure of the rose—with its one and one-half line description negating by its very length the accusation of its brevity—stand as an emotional denial of the strong warning of death. The phrase *nimum brevis / flores amoenae rosae* is as ambiguous as is the phrase *rosa sera* in 1.38.

The pattern displayed in the four poems examined above persists with each mention of the rose. The rose is always an emblem of both perfection and the impossibility of perfection, and it is almost invariably linked with temporal words and images. In 2.11, a poem that bears a marked resemblance to 2.3, Horace warns his friend Quinctius not to worry about foreign or domestic affairs because life is short, changes happen fast, and the future is uncertain. The present is, he claims, a better investment than the future. Again, Horace takes his examples, both negative and positive, from nature (2.11.9–11, 13–17):

non semper idem floribus est honor
vernīs, neque uno Luna rubens nitet
vultu. . . .

cur non sub alta vel platano vel hac
pinu iacentes sic temere et rosa
canos odorati capillos,
dum licet, Assyriaque nardo
potamus uncti?

The glory of spring flowers is not / forever, and the bright moon does not always shine with the same face. . . . Isn't it better to drink while we may, / reclining casually beneath some / lofty plane or pine, greybeards wreathed / in fragrant roses, anointed / with Syrian nard?

Horace problematizes the attractive side of nature here by his use of portentous and negative words and images: the word *temere* (14), related to *timor* and Sanskrit *tamra* (darkening, blinding); the aging white hair that the roses adorn (14–15); the familiar temporizing phrase *dum licet* (16). The happy tone of the banquet is tempered by the adjective *canos* that modifies *capillos* (15) and reminds us that old age approaches.³¹

In *Carmen* 3.29 Maecenas too is called away from worrying about Rome and politics to a party in the country with wine, perfume, and roses. Perhaps Horace felt the need for more tact in this case; he does not mention explicitly, as he does to Quinctius, that old age is approaching fast, but the poem is loaded with time words: *non ante* (2); *iamdudum, morae* (5); *vices* (13). Telephus in 3.19 is urged to quit the past and *sparge rosas* (22); the girls mentioned are *tempestiva* Rhode (“Ready Rosy,” 27) and

30. See Porter, *Poetic Journey*, pp. 114–15, who discusses the relationship of *Carm.* 2.2 to 2.3 and says that Horace moves from an emphasis on human choice and self-reliance in 2.2 to an attitude of resignation in 2.3.

31. Santirocco, *Unity and Design*, pp. 92–93, compares 2.9 and 2.11, both of which advise friends to conform to nature's harmony. Reckford, *Horace*, pp. 96–97, points out that the methods used in this poem to stave off cares represent more a “flight into the present” than an acceptance of it.

Glycera ("Sweetness" or "Ripeness," 28),³² whose very names underscore the timeliness of the roses and add temporal urgency. It is clear from Horace's harsh words to Chloris in 3.15 that roses belong more to youth and the present than to old age; they symbolize an appropriate use of natural products in their cultural context.³³ In all these poems, nature is a moral paradigm, reminding us that, as seasons turn, the moon changes phases, and flowers fade, so we humans will inevitably die.

Thus, in Horace's *Odes*, the rose appears as a theme and symbol in nine poems that share many important themes. It is sometimes modified by words loaded with cultural implications but more often set into contexts that lend to the stark and unmodified *rosa* its significance. The idea of the rose is always accompanied by the theme of temporality, and it is identified with youth and present time. It seems to carry an ambiguous message, standing for the perfection we all desire to attain, yet by its context indicating the impossibility of the existence of such perfection. Horace uses the rose as an invitation to accept the cycles and progress of nature and to desire its beauty, but to realize at the same time that the beauty of nature is rooted in change. Those he lectures—Quinctius, Delli, Maecenas, Chloris, Telephus—cling to the past or look to the future. Horace holds out to them the symbol of the rose, not to urge that they desire it in its perfection, which would not be submitting to nature's progress, but to show them that such products of nature are always tainted and changed by their surroundings. To wish to grasp the rose at its peak would be to desire the eternal present, the impossible goal of a hero like Achilles. But this is not the world of heroes, and timelessness is not offered as a possibility. Harmony with nature is.³⁴

III

Finally, I would like to look at the use of the rose in two of Horace's Greek predecessors in lyric poetry, Sappho and Pindar,³⁵ in a Greek poet closer to his own time, Meleager of Gadara, and in his main Roman model, Vergil, in order to determine where Horace's use of the rose as a symbol fits into the Greek and Roman poetic tradition.

ῥόδον in simple or compound form appears eight times in Sappho's poetry,³⁶ and it occurs in the contexts of love, poetry, and divine epiphanies. Like the word *rosa* in Horace's *Odes*, ῥόδον is often found in company with perfume, other flowers, and a festal situation (frags. 2.6, 94.13 L.-P.). But in Sappho, the rose also seems to be associated often with poetry (frag.

32. The quality of sweetness can very easily transfer to ripeness (as in, for example, a grape).

33. Cf. also Ligurinus in *Carm.* 4.10, whose youthful skin is pinker than a rose but soon will become bristly and bearded (4–5).

34. See Reckford, *Horace*, p. 98, on *Carm.* 2.6 and 3.29: "self-sufficiency and evenness of temper mean more to us, and seem more capable of imitation, if their famed exponent sometimes felt sorry for himself or rebelled at heart against the laws of nature that simple politeness bids us accept without complaint."

35. Alcaeus does not use ῥόδον except in one fragment which cannot be interpreted (frag. 115a.22 L.-P.).

36. Sappho, frags. 2.6, 53.1, 55.2, 58.19, 74a.4, 94.13, 96.8, 96.13 L.-P. Meleager calls Sappho's poems βαῖα μέν, ἀλλὰ ῥόδα (*Anth. Pal.* 4.1.6).

55.2 L.–P.) or to be set firmly in a natural or otherworldly environment where divinities hold sway, usually Aphrodite (frags. 2.6, 53.1, 96.8, 13).³⁷ Unlike Horace, Sappho makes no attempt to turn the rose into a cultural symbol or to connect it with human measures of time.

Sappho's most interesting use of the rose comes in fragment 96.6–14 L.–P.:

νῦν δὲ Λύδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναί-
κεσσιν ὥς ποτ' ἀελίῳ
δύντος ἅ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα

πάντα περρέχουσ' ἄστρα· φάος δ' ἐπί-
σχει θάλασσαν ἐπ' ἄλμύραν
ἴσως καὶ πολυανθέμοις ἀρούραις·

10

ἅ δ' ἔέρσα καλὰ κέχυται, τεθά-
λαισι δὲ βρόδα κᾶπαλ' ἄν-
θρυσκα καὶ μελίλωτος ἀνθεμώδης·

Now among Lydian women she in her / turn stands first as the red- / fingered moon ris-
ing at sunset takes / precedence over stars around her; / her light spreads equally / on
the salt sea and fields thick with bloom. / Delicious dew pours down to freshen / roses,
delicate thyme / and blossoming sweet clover.³⁸

In this poem there is an extended simile comparing the woman whom Sappho describes to the rosy-fingered moon, which causes light to shine over everything, dew to fall, and flowers, specifically roses, chervil, and clover, to bloom. While there is some sympathy between nature and human emotion here and elsewhere (frag. 94 L.–P.), Sappho does not create a conscious link between the products of nature and their lesson for mortals, who must appropriately interpret and accommodate themselves to the rhythms of nature. Sappho does not make nature into a moral imperative; rather, it forms a sensitively described backdrop that mirrors the human emotions and actions set in it.

Horace's other main model among the lyric poets, Pindar, uses the word ῥόδον twice, and in contexts quite similar to Sappho's use of it.³⁹ The word appears in a dithyramb composed for an Athenian spring festival, possibly the great Dionysia; for this festival, the poet calls forth flowers (violets, roses), songs, music, and dance in a context of divine presence.⁴⁰ The second appearance of the word is in *Isthmian* 4.20 (Bowra). In a celebration of the family of Melissus, a victor in the pankration in 478(?) B.C.,

37. Page, in his discussion of frag. 2, claims that Sappho is describing a real, not imaginary place. He disapprovingly quotes Turyn who says that "the picture of the holy place in the poem is . . . composed in accordance with traditional Greek descriptions of paradise, which originated in the Orphic eschatology." See D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1955), p. 40 and n. 3.

38. The translation used here is by M. Barnard, *Sappho* (Berkeley, 1958), # 40.

39. The only other occurrences of ῥόδον/Rόδον in Pindar are mentions of the island of Rhodes (*Ol.* 7.14, 56, 71; *Enc.* 119.1).

40. See Pind. *Dith.* 63.18 (Bowra).

Pindar says that the family had fallen into eclipse and lost several heroes in a short time. Now a metaphorical spring has awakened the family once again, and the ground “blossoms with crimson roses by the will of the gods.” As in *Dithyramb* 63, the rose grows here in a divine, magical context, but in *Isthmian* 4, it is used in an entirely metaphorical way. It symbolizes the resurgence of life for a prominent family, and it is held out as a rare and precious flower that grows only at the behest of the gods. As in Horace, the rose is connected by Pindar to nature’s rhythms, which he implicitly compares to the inevitable cycles of life (both human and natural) and the seasons. For Pindar, who takes a multi-generational view of his human subjects, generations of families have the same potential rhythms as nature does. So in Pindar’s use of the rose, we move closer to the link that Horace emphasizes between human and natural cycles and rhythms.

The first-century B.C. epigrammatist Meleager of Gadara provides an interesting contrast for the uses of the rose that we find in still-developing form in Sappho and Pindar and made into a dominant metaphor by Horace. In Meleager, ῥόδον symbolizes an almost pure eroticism that is present in Horace, but is superseded and controlled by the complex layers of meaning it comes to contain. We might almost say that, in Meleager, ῥόδον exemplifies the workings of the pathetic fallacy: in one poem, the rose weeps because the speaker’s lover is absent (*Anth. Pal.* 5.136). Several times, ῥόδον appears in company with the erotic adjective φιλέραστον, (5.136.5, 147.4), the noun Πειθώ (5.144.4), and once, in a poem by Nossis in the *Garland*, together with Aphrodite: τίνα δ’ ἅ Κύπρις οὐκ ἐφίλασεν, / οὐκ οἶδεν κήνα γ’ ἄνθεα ποῖα ῥόδα (“the one whom Aphrodite has not kissed does not know what kind of flowers roses are” [*Anth. Pal.* 5.170.3–4]). Horace certainly admits the lush and erotic nature of the rose in poems like 1.5, 1.36, and 3.19, but it is this quality, along with the sought-after perfection symbolized by the rose, that Horace explicitly rejects in his warnings to live simply and for the present.

Vergil uses the words *rosa*, *roseus*, and *rosarium* many times in his works.⁴¹ I have mentioned above Vergil’s only use of *rosarium*, which appears in *Georgics* 4.119. Here, in the episode of the Corycian gardener (*G.* 4.116–48), Vergil alludes to the *biferi rosaria Paesti*, the famous twice-blooming rose of Paestum, which, unlike all of the other once-blooming spring roses of brief duration, bloomed in the spring and again in the fall. The roses are mentioned as part of an extended *praeteritio*, in which Vergil expresses a regret that he cannot linger over the vision of this gardener, who tends a *pinguis hortus* not well-suited to the world of the *Georgics*. The unnaturally twice-blooming roses are an indication of the idealized nature of the picture presented here and form a part of this luxuriant, but not impossible, garden that Vergil creates. The Corycian gardener manipulates his

41. By “Vergil,” I mean not only the poet of the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics* (the words do not appear in the *Eclogues*), but also the author of the minor works sometimes attributed to him. I will cite uses in these minor works as well. *Rosa* appears eight times (*Aen.* 12.69, *G.* 4.134, 268, *Culex* 399, *Copa* 7, 14, *Ciris* 98, *Priapea* 1.1), *rosarium* one time (*G.* 4.119), and *roseus* thirteen times (*Aen.* 1.402, 2.593, 6.535, 7.26, 7.712, 9.5, 11.913, 12.606, *Ciris* 122, *Copa* 32, *Culex* 44, *Lydia* 11, 73).

environment and creates a world where strange and wonderful, but not unreal, things happen.⁴²

Elsewhere, Vergil uses *rosa* and *roseus* in many of the same contexts in which it is found in the Greek poets and Horace. These words often appear in settings that are either natural (*Ciris* 98) or, more often, nature tamed by the hand of man (*G.* 4.134, 268, *Culex* 399, *Copa* 7, 14, 32, *Priapea* 1.1). In these passages, roses are planted in cultivated gardens, found in grottoes, prepared as a remedy for sick bees, made into garlands, and used at parties. In one passage, the roses are growing on a Priapus statue, a natural growth on a man-made monument (*Priapea* 1.1). Elsewhere, the rose is described as *pudibunda*, a word clearly appropriated from the world of human emotions (*Culex* 399). Even in the one passage where roses do appear wild and uncultivated they are found growing at the door of the temple of the Muses and are thus connected to humans and poetry (*Ciris* 98). The connection of roses in particular to cultivated nature or cultured surroundings is clearly made.

Vergil, like Sappho, also uses *rosa* and *roseus* to describe the lips, fingers, hair, clothing, and chariots of various divinities: Apollo (*Aen.* 11.913); Aurora (*Culex* 44, *Lydia* 73, *Aen.* 6.535, 7.26); Iris (*Aen.* 9.5); Venus (*Aen.* 1.402, 2.593). In a few passages, mortals (either directly or by transference) are described as *roseus*: Lavinia (*Aen.* 12.69, 606); Lydia (*Lydia* 11); Nisus (*Ciris* 122). In many of these passages the divinity is described as gleaming or flashing, and there is an implicit contrast of the white gleam with the red rose (*Aen.* 1.402, 7.26). This white/red (or yellow/red) contrast is made explicit in several passages where Vergil focuses on the color of flowers and contrasts the dark, blood-colored roses to lighter flowers and white hair or feet.⁴³ So in the *Aeneid*, the anguished Lavinia is described as appearing like Indian ivory stained with crimson purple or white lilies mixed with red roses (12.67–69). Elsewhere, Lydia walks with snowy footsteps plucking green grapes with her rosy fingers (*Lydia* 10–11).⁴⁴ The most interesting of these color passages is the description of Nisus in *Ciris* 120–22, where his rosy lock of hair (*roseus crinis*), the insurance of his and his country's safety, rises from the top of his white hair (*candida caesaries*).⁴⁵ In such a passage, Horace would use the connection of the roseate

42. Vergil mentions other similar unusual natural occurrences in the *laudes Italiae*, where he praises Italy's eternal spring, summers that occur in other seasons, and "bis gravidæ pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos" (*G.* 2.150). Here, included in a list of *adunata*, the claims are clearly false, but the *biferi rosaria Paesti* are a different matter. This phenomenon of the twice-blooming rose (our Damask rose, which Pliny calls Milesian in *HN* 21.10.16) is quite possible, and other writers mention the famous roses of Paestum (although none includes the epithet *bifer*). See Prop. 4.5.61, Ovid *Met.* 15.708. See also the comments of R. F. Thomas, who says that, although the Corycian gardener's success and tranquility are situated outside of the bounds of the usual georgic framework, he nevertheless is portrayed as part of a real world and not a golden age (*Virgil: "Georgics,"* vol. 2 [Cambridge, 1988], pp. 167–69). C. Perrell, on the other hand, sees the Corycian gardener as an "irretrievable dream," a Golden Age ideal (*The Poet's Truth: A Study of the Poet in Virgil's "Georgics"* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989], p. 66).

43. Such passages are also common in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where they usually appear in the context of separation and castration; see the stories of Narcissus (*Met.* 3.407–510), Hyacinthus (*Met.* 10.162–219), and Adonis (*Met.* 10.708–39).

44. Cf. also *Copa* 13–14, where the landscape offers up chaplets of violets mixed with saffron and yellow garlands mixed with crimson roses.

lock and the whitening hair to draw a lesson about Nisus' mortality and time passing; this idea may be implicit here in the mention of the Fates (125), but the author of the *Ciris* seems interested mainly in the rhetorical play afforded by the color contrasts.

Thus the uses of *rosa* and related words in Vergil's poetry show some similarities to Sappho's uses of the word. Like Sappho, Vergil employs the word to describe divinities and objects at parties and festivities. He sometimes appropriates *rosa* when it is used in a cultural context for human settings and emotions. But unlike Sappho, Vergil does not use *rosa* to refer to poetry or love.⁴⁶

The appearance of *rosa* in Vergil parallels Horace's uses of the word in several ways. Both poets use it in connection with parties, and both wrench the rose from its natural, wild setting in order to make it part of a human, cultural context. But, unlike Horace, who nearly always puts the rose firmly in a human and temporal context, Vergil only once gives the rose human characteristics with the word *pudibunda* in *Culex* 399. Interestingly the word *rosa* does not appear in the *Eclogues*; perhaps this indicates that Vergil felt it belonged more properly to the cultivated world of nature seen in the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* than to the pastoral setting of the *Eclogues*.

Thus Vergil occasionally embeds the rose in human surroundings or extends to it human emotions, but he never turns the rose into a symbol of man's impossible quest for perfection and timelessness as Horace does, and he is much more interested in its natural properties. Vergil knows—and tells us—that the rose is an early spring flower (*G.* 4.134) and that the twice-blooming roses of Paestum are a rarity in nature. The only passage in which Vergil ever links such properties of the rose to time is in the episode of the Corycian farmer in *Georgics* 4. Here Vergil shows that the farmer tries to manipulate time by being the first to pick the spring rose and the fall apples and by rebuking laggard summer (*aestatem seram*) and delaying winds (*Zephyros morantis*, 138) for keeping the hyacinth from blooming.⁴⁷ The *biferi rosaria Paesti* in *Georgics* 4.119 seem to represent something that is unnatural and thus impossible for the farmer; the other fruits and flowers that he harvests all grow and are picked at their normal time. This farmer tries to hasten or anticipate the normal cycles of nature, but he does not attempt actually to change the course of nature as so many of Horace's characters do.

IV

The use of the rose both in Horace's Greek predecessors and in his Roman contemporaries prefigures Horace's employment of it as a dominant metaphor in his poetry. Sappho uses the rose to create a link between nature and human emotions. In Pindar, the rose is raised to a more abstract level

45. Also in this passage Nisus has a laurel garland on his head (*Ciris* 121).

46. The possible exception is *Ciris* 98.

47. Cf. *aestatem seram* with Horace's *rosa sera* in *Carm.* 1.38.3.

where it symbolizes the rhythms of human lives. Meleager highlights an erotic quality of the rose that lingers in Horace's poetry, although he resists and rejects it. Horace's closest contemporary, Vergil, makes a connection between the rose and the taming of nature by man, and he uses it in the *Georgics* to symbolize the human interaction with nature's cycles and seasons.

In all these poets, we can see that the rose is an occasional metaphor for the interaction of human and natural life, but Horace is the only poet to remove the rose from nature, place it firmly in a human and cultural context, and assign to the rose clearly human characteristics. In Horace's *Odes*, the word *rosa* is nearly always put in the context of fleeting desires and missed opportunities, and it comes to signal the primary Horatian idea of temporality. It becomes strongly identified with Horace's repeated injunction, *carpe diem*, and it is a symbol of the present we can hope to attain if we cease to strive for perfection, for the missed events of the past, or for the elusive moments of the future. In Horace's poetry the rose grows from its use in earlier Greek and other Roman poets as the perfect exemplar of nature, notable for its scent and its visual beauty and color, to a complex symbol of luxury and simplicity, of the desire for perfection and the acknowledgement of its impossibility, and of the necessity for human beings to act in accord with nature's cycles and rhythms. The rose takes on this complexity because of its constant association with the uniquely human preoccupation with time, implied occasionally by earlier poets, but clarified and crystallized in Horace's *Odes*.

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