

XVII. The Poet's Apotheosis: Horace, *Odes* 1.1

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Horace's first, dedicatory poem (*Odes* 1.1), as many scholars have noted,¹ possesses a peculiarly elusive charm. For one thing, it would seem to speak far more about the poet than would appear suitable for a solemn dedication to his patron. Indeed, as Nauck was the first to point out, the only lines which mention Maecenas, the first and the last couplet (1-2, 35-36), might easily be detached from the poem. And if they are, we have a thirty-two line poem on the various avocations of men, ending with the lyric poet. On this analysis the poem would fall into eight four-line strophes, beginning with the clearly articulated references: *sunt quos* (3) . . . *hunc* (7), *gaudentem* (11) . . . *luctantem* (15), *est qui* (19) . . . *multos* (23), although after line 27 the structure seems to break down. In any case, there would at first sight appear to be a clash between the dedicatory motif (1-2, 35-36) and the heart of the poem, which is a list of men's various pursuits, concluding with the implication that the poet's life is superior to all the rest. Now it is precisely the function of this "vocation catalogue" in the poem which has not, in my view, been completely understood.

Typical is the summary we find in the commentary by the great nineteenth century scholar, Charles Anthon. The theme of the dedication ode is that "the objects of human desire and pursuit are various . . . My chief aim is the successful cultivation of lyric verse, in which if I shall obtain your applause, O Maecenas, my lot will be a happy one indeed."² And later commentators show a similar lack of appreciation of Horace's use of the catalogue, which is not infrequently found elsewhere. For example, he uses it with great effect in *Satires* 1.1.1 ff., where he stresses the

¹ See E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 230-33, where much of the important earlier literature on the *Ode* is mentioned. Further bibliography may be found in the Kiessling-Heinze edition, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Oden und Epoden* (10th ed. with addenda by Erich Burck, Berlin 1960) 1 ff., with the bibliographical notice, 611 ff.

² See C. Anthon, *Q. Horatii Flacci poemata: textum . . . instructum prolegomenis et excursibus* (in two parts, New York 1830) part 2 (*Explanatory Notes*), page 11.

fact, in the spirit of the Cynic diatribe on μεμψιμοιρία,³ that all men are unhappy with their lot—the soldier, the merchant-trader, the farmer, the solicitor, the sailor, the tavern keeper. All, that is, except the poet himself, who, living above the mad race of Roman life, sees clearly the modest limits of human existence, and tries to instruct others in the art of partaking moderately of the banquet of life. Thus in Horace's first *Satire* the catalogue serves to point up the basic insecurity and anxiety of the majority of mankind, with the suggestion that the poet from his superior vantage point can discover the answer. In the finale, the image of the race course, which sums up the mad rush for wealth and position at Rome, is countered by the quiet banquet scene, Horace's image for the simple enjoyment of life. Whatever the Hellenistic models for the first *Satire*, it is clear that Horace has transformed them in a superior way.

There is also a modified use of the vocation catalogue in *Epode* 2, where the cynical usurer, Alfius, praises the life of the simple farmer as a pretext for calling in all the money he has out on loan. Here, in speaking of the farmer as far removed from the various trades and businesses, Horace actually magnifies the farmer's life into an idyllic vision of the Golden Age (*Epode* 2.1–4):

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
ut prisca gens mortalium,
paterna rura bobus exercet suis
solutus omni fenore. . . .

Thus as Alfius develops his eulogy of farm life against the background of the Golden Age (2, *ut prisca gens mortalium*), we begin to feel that for the poet here the beginning of man's woe—the end of the Golden Age—was brought on by money and money-lending; hence came the multiplication of men's pursuits—soldiers, sailors, clients, and nobles—with all the ensuing class distinctions based either on income or birth. Here, in the second *Epode*, the differentiation in men's pursuits, other than farming, is a sign of the end of the Golden Age; and Alfius, who instead of wine, honey, and oil, produces money and more money, is a monstrous example of man's abandonment of the primitive

³ For the possible sources, see G. C. Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace* (Madison 1920) 219 ff.; cf. Fraenkel (above, note 1) 93.

ideal.⁴ We are reminded of the enumeration of the different walks of life in Vergil, *Georgics* 2.538 ff., at the very close of a book dedicated to Maecenas, *O decus* (2.40). Not usually one to borrow techniques of this sort, Vergil nonetheless enhances the life of the farmer—or, rather, the farmer who is also a poet-philosopher—by contrasting it with the pursuits of other men. Vergil, too, has been called aside by the Muses (2.475):

me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae.

Vergil does not enumerate the various avocations of men in an orderly fashion; but we can see clearly the life of the city dweller, the soldier and military commandant, the city politician, the wealthy miser, the vicious mob controlled by rhetoric. The life of the contemplative farmer, as Vergil paints it, was the one shared by the ancient Sabine and Latin tribes, by the Etruscans and, indeed, by all men before the advent of Jupiter's reign, in the Golden Age of Saturn, before smiths fashioned swords, and before the war trumpet's blast. This final passage in the second book of the *Georgics* contains the heart of the entire poem, a glorification of that life (2.467), that

secura quies et nescia fallere vita.

Tibullus, too, like Vergil, associates the life of the poet-farmer with the spirit of the Golden Age, before the diversification of crafts and trades, before the rise of wealth and fortified cities and consequent war (*Elegies* 1.10). For in those days (1.10.10–11),

securus varias dux gregis inter oves.
tunc mihi vita foret.

For each in his way, for Tibullus and Vergil, the poet is a throw-back to a Golden Age.

It is against this background that the vocation catalogue of *Odes* 1.1 becomes somewhat more clear. Here we have Horace's longest list of careers:

Odes 1.1

PARALLEL CONTEXTS

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|--------------------|---|
| 1. The charioteer. | Cf. <i>Sat.</i> 1.1.114–16, <i>Ep.</i> 1.1.49–51. |
| 2. The politician. | <i>Epode</i> 2.7–8, <i>Ep.</i> 1.6.49 ff. |

⁴ Cf. also the comments by Fraenkel (above, note 1) 61, quoting Sellar: "It is characteristic of Horace, when he is most in earnest, to check himself and bring himself back to the ordinary mood in which he meets society." On the epode see also S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven 1962) 106–7.

3. The wealthy estate-owner with African investments. *Sat.* 1.1.45.
4. The poor Italian farmer. *Epode* 2.3.
5. The sailor. *Epode* 2.6, *Sat.* 1.1.29–30.
6. The merchant-trader. *Sat.* 1.1.6, *Ep.* 1.11.15–16.
7. The lazy drinker. *Epode* 2.23–28.
8. The soldier. *Epode* 2.5, *Sat.* 1.1.5.
9. The hunter. *Epode* 2.29–36.
10. The lyric poet.

It would seem better, however, to identify item 7, the lazy drinker, with item 10, the poet. Horace was obviously not one to quarrel with breaking up the day to stretch beneath the shade and drink cool wine beneath a gentle stream. Of the several vocations, this is not one as the others are; and, as we shall see farther on, the same scene seems more fully developed in *Epode* 2. In this way we arrive at nine categories to sum up all the various careers of ancient Rome. It should be noted, however, that many earlier scholars have long underlined Horace's debt to the Greek poets in their use of such catalogues,⁵ especially Solon, Pindar, and Bacchylides; but in speaking of the device as a *preambulum* or "priamel" they fail to stress the special way in which Horace has adapted and transformed it.

A very small but charming fragment of Pindar in typically dactylo-epitrite metre, beginning ἀελλοπόδων (Fr. 221 Schr.)⁶ from an unknown book, had already been noticed as a parallel by Richard Bentley in his edition of Horace. It runs:

Some have joy of the crowns and honors
 Won by steeds with storm-swift hooves;
 Others dwell in gold-precious halls.
 Still others delight with dashing prow
 To cleave the swell of the sea.

Here in this tiny Pindaric fragment, the charioteer, the man of luxurious tastes, the intrepid sailor—all become examples of

⁵ Also cited are Sappho, Fr. 16 (Lobel-Page); Euripides, Fr. 659 N. from the *Rhadamanthys*. Cf. Fraenkel (above, note 1) 231.

⁶ Also Fr. 221 in the edition of B. Snell (2nd ed. Leipzig 1955), and Fr. 260 in the edition of A. Turyn (Cambridge [Mass.] 1952).

divergent interests, and perhaps, of happiness attained. We cannot be certain of the conclusion, as the fragment unfortunately breaks off.

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff had already cited as a parallel the tenth *Ode* of Bacchylides, composed for an anonymous victor at the Isthmian games.⁷ Bacchylides divides men into different classes according to their talents taken in a wide sense. For example,

Various are the paths men tread
In search of shining reknown.
Myriad are the skills of men.
One has wisdom, another blooms with the golden hope
Of the Graces, another with the gift of prophecy;
Another aims his bow at wealth;
Yet another delights his heart
In the works of the farm and in his herds of oxen.

The poet of Ceos then concludes with a brief mention of the emptiness of riches, but he breaks off without drawing a definite conclusion. Perhaps still more apposite is the fourteenth *Victory Ode* which Bacchylides composed to be sung for Cleoptolemus. It begins:⁸

The god's best gift is a happy lot.
A good man can be crushed by sorrow's burdens,
And yet good fortune can raise a man on high.
Men enjoy quite different sorts of honor,
For myriad are their talents.
But what stands forever preeminent
Is the guidance of one's hands with righteous heart.

What intrigues the poet is the wide diversity of men's talents and pursuits; moral behavior seems to be foremost, but he does not pause to probe the matter deeply.

There is a fine Solonic piece (Fr. 1.43 ff.), longer and of more interest.⁹ σπεύδει ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος: men have different drives, says the legislator in the elegiac fragment. The merchant-trader sails the perilous seas, the farmer ploughs his land, the

⁷ See *Bacchylidis carmina cum fragmentis*⁸, ed. B. Snell (Leipzig 1961), Fr. 10. Cf. also Kiessling-Heinze (above, note 1) 2.

⁸ See B. Snell (above, note 7) Fr. 14.1 ff., and cf. R. C. Jebb, *Bacchylides: The Poems and Fragments* (Cambridge 1905) 357 ff.

⁹ Solon, Fr. 1.43-56, ed. E. Diehl, *Anthologia lyrica graeca*⁹ (Leipzig 1954).

craftsman and the smithy practice the arts of Athena and Hephaestus, the poet has received his "measure of wisdom" (σοφίης μέτρον), the prophet foretells men's weal or woe by a gift from the gods. But none of these men can escape the all-embracing *Moira* which rules the universe. But Solon is also thinking of the fruitful collaboration of all the various professions within the harmony of the Greek political community; thus he has adapted the vocation catalogue for his own ethical and political ends. Finally, there is an interesting catalogue which occurs in one of the fourth century sophistic pieces called *δισσοὶ λόγοι*, which we may translate, "Contrasting Points of View."¹⁰ Actually it occurs in the first of the nine short pieces called *On Good and Evil*, and seems like an unoriginal derivative of the school of Protagoras. The writer's theme is that good and bad are purely relative, depending on men's interests and avocations; a typical sentence is: "Shipwreck is bad for the sailor, but good for the shipbuilder" (1.4). In this way the anonymous sophist enumerates various aspects of good and evil insofar as they affect doctors, undertakers, grave-diggers, farmers, tradesmen, sailors, shipwrights, smiths, potters, and shoemakers. Though a trivial and sometimes childish piece of work, it offers interesting evidence for the growing rhetoric and dialectic of the period after the Peloponnesian War.

But in none of these catalogues is the role of the poet so enhanced as we find it in Horace's use of the technique. There is implied the variety and sometimes the arbitrariness of men's pursuits, men's common share in anxiety and discontent. But in Horace there is always the implication that the poet has the more balanced view of life, shares a superior existence. Thus against this background it becomes easier to see that the catalogue of *Odes* 1.1 is not merely, as L. Desprez summed it up in the old Dauphin edition, a question of "*Alios aliis rebus duci, se laude poëseos praesertim lyricae.*" Rather, its purpose is to show that the poet's vocation is the greatest of all—and here is the function of the poem as a dedication—especially a poet who is recognized and supported by such a noble patron as C. Maecenas.

It may be of interest to note another set of ancient parallels for the vocation catalogue. There is a long section in a late Egyptian

¹⁰ Diels-Kranz, *Die Fr. d. Vors.*¹⁰ (Berlin 1960-61) 2.90.1. For a comment on the piece, see K. Freeman, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*² (Oxford 1949) 417 ff.

document of the New Kingdom on the profession of the royal scribe. It is contained in *PAnastasi* II, and the relevant passages are as follows:¹¹

Be a scribe. It saves you from toil and protects you from all manner of work. It spares you bearing hoe and mattock, so that you do not carry a basket. It sunders you from plying the oar and spares you torment, as you are not under many lords and numerous masters.

The papyrus then goes on to mention the service of the soldier, the old farmer in the fields, the lame door-keeper, the blind cattle-feeder, the bird-catcher, the poor fisherman. The busy priest "does not distinguish between summer and winter"; the farmer loses his daughter and his devoted maidservant. Finally there is the amusing passage:

The baker regularly bakes and puts bread onto the fire, his head being inside the oven and his son holding fast his feet. In the event of slipping from his son's hand he thereby falls down into the oven's bottom.

Thus no vocation lacks its perils. And so the account concludes: "But the scribe, he is ahead of all manner of work in this world." Similar lists are not uncommon in Egypt for the same period.¹² Further, it is not unlikely that the same technique is reflected in a catalogue found in the late Greek biblical book, the Wisdom of Sirach, in a passage eulogizing the Jewish scribe above all other vocations (*Sirach* 38.24–39.11). It begins (38.24):¹³ "The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; and he who has little business may become wise." Ben Sirach then enumerates the other professions in a disparaging tone:

¹¹ For the translation I am indebted to R. A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (London 1954), *P Anastasi* II.8, pages 50–51. This work is a translation and commentary on the New Kingdom hieratic texts formerly edited by Sir Alan Gardiner in *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca 7 [Brussels 1937]). The theme of the scribe's superiority is, according to Gardiner, a commonplace of the Ramesside literary miscellanies: see especially his article, "Writing and Literature," in *The Legacy of Egypt*, ed. by S. R. K. Glanville (Oxford 1942) 71. For other references to the importance of the scribe's vocation, see *PAnastasi* III.6, in Caminos, *op. cit.*, 92 (in contrast with the hardships of the soldier's life); *PAnastasi* III.11, Caminos, *op. cit.*, 247 (in contrast with the peasant farmer).

¹² See Caminos, *op. cit.* (above, note 11), 315, 395, 400, and *passim* for similar literature.

¹³ See *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament: Revised Standard Version* (New York 1957) 154–55. Cf. also the remarks of Gardiner in *The Legacy of Egypt* (above, note 11) 71.

the ploughman, the cutter of seals and signets, the smith, the potter at his wheel. "Without them a city cannot be established" (Sirach 38.32), and yet all of these are inferior to the scribe "who devoted himself to the study of the law" (39.1). This Egyptian, or Semitic, type of catalogue, which shows the superiority of one vocation over the rest, is markedly different from the one we are familiar with from our Greek sources.

The parallel is an interesting one, for in Horace's use of the catalogue device, the implication, however subtle, is always clear: it is the ultimate superiority of the poet's own way of life over all the rest. Even in Horace's dialogue-satire on men's madness (*Sat.* 2.3), he agrees that the poet like all other men is mad—but even here it is a minor, lovable sort of aberration. Hence to return to the catalogue of *Odes* 1.1, the function of the list now becomes clear; indeed, the point is more obvious if, as I earlier suggested, we identify item 7 ("the lazy drinker") with item 10, that is, the poet himself, to make nine in all. For the man who knows how to enjoy the day by drinking in the shade of the wild-strawberry tree does not represent a vocation in the way the others do; he does not stand for (in the words of Charles Anthon) "the voluptuary, who begins to quaff the old Massic before the accustomed hour."¹⁴ Rather, it is none other than Horace himself. And this seems confirmed by the parallel passage in *Epode* 2.23 ff., where we see the ideal farmer resting from his toil as though in some idyllic, distant age:

It's pleasant to lie beneath some ancient oak
Or on thick-tufted grass,
While nearby water slips by lofty banks
And birds warble in the wood,
And rustling leaves sound under purling water
Tempting us to sleep.

Thus too in *Odes* 1.1.19–22 it would seem justified to see the poet lying at his ease under the *arbutus* or at the head of some sacred spring; there are some parallels even in the style of the *Epode* (*modo . . . modo*) and the *Ode* (*nunc . . . nunc*). Identifying the poet, then, with the lazy drinker of *Odes* 1.1 we can catch more clearly the ultimate purpose and tone of the vocation catalogue. As in the second *Epode*, the life of leisure and creativity is an evocation,

¹⁴ Anthon, *op. cit.* (above, note 2), part 2, page 14.

somehow, of the Golden Age, before the advent of trade and barter, before distinctions of birth and class. Hence in *Odes* 1.1 the obvious superiority of the life Horace has chosen for himself under the aegis of Maecenas.

Now further, if we examine the language of the *Ode* more closely we see that this superiority is expressed in terms of apotheosis. The goal of other men, of the athlete and the politician, is their being raised to the gods (6, *evēhit ad deos*); but this is realized all the more fully in the life of the lyric poet who has been sharply separated from the mob (32), and enjoys the familiar company of the gods (30). All of this may also be read on a more prosaic level: for Horace, the son of a freedman, found the ordinary avenues of Roman social and political life closed to him; but, if he has been forced by circumstances to become a spectator at the race for fame and position, the Muses of poetry have separated him from the *populus*, and Maecenas and the "first men" of Rome have recognized his talents in allowing him to "mingle among the gods" (30). This then is the ultimate meaning of Horace's apotheosis. For as a poet Horace comes closest to the gods by his special, contemplative vision of life—this is the meaning of his separation from the people—even before Maecenas can pay him the honor of counting him among the great lyric poets of antiquity. The self-eulogy of the poem is subtly ambiguous, and achieves the purpose of the dedication in much the same way as *Odes* 3.30, *Exegi monumentum*, functions as a final seal.

Hence the first and last couplets of the poem are integrally connected with the central theme: Horace's apotheosis consists in rising above all the various careers at Rome, in which ordinary men attain their glory, by his own special poetic talent as well as by the generous patronage of Maecenas. As the athlete is raised to heaven by the whirl of the chariot wheels, so Horace is apotheosized through his poetry. Yet the poet, as he rises to the heavens, knocks his head on the stars. The verb here used, *feriam*, suggests the suddenness of, whimsically, the unexpected violence of Horace's rise to the gods.¹⁵ Here we have perhaps a very delicate touch of humor—for Horace can never take himself too seriously for long—and it is perhaps paralleled in the mock apotheosis of *Odes* 2.20, where the poet rises from the funeral

¹⁵ Compare, for example, Ovid's more gentle use of the same idiom in the *Metamorphoses* 7.61: *vertice sidera tangam*.

pyre to be transmogrified into a swan and proceeds to soar over all the Roman empire. So too in *Odes* 1.1, the *machina* which whisks the poet theatrically to the heavens goes too fast or too far. In any case, what is so charming about the dedication *Ode* is that against the background of a vocation catalogue which suggests Horace's sense of superiority, the poet has gracefully turned the focus of the poem upon his patron. It is now as if the cause of Horace's apotheosis is not so much his own talent but rather that Maecenas thinks of him. It is this that has brought him, a freedman's son, to mingle with the gods. It is a splendid final touch, and surely disarms anyone who would charge the poet with egotism. Thus too, he seems to say, there is something godlike in Maecenas; for Maecenas was, in fact, the human agent of his apotheosis.