

GOOD WINE IN A NEW VASE (HORACE, *EPISTLES* 1.2)

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The epistle to Lollius Maximus on the pursuit of virtue (*Epist.* 1.2)¹ reflects Horace's preoccupations during the years 23–20 B.C. He was rediscovering Homer and perhaps other books he knew as a boy and finding, as so many have found since, how profound was Homer's insight into human nature, without the obscurities and airs of the

¹ For the text I have used H. W. Garrod, *Q. Horati Flacci opera* (Oxford, repr. 1959); F. Klingner, *Q. Horati Flacci opera* (Leipzig 1959); D. Bo, *Q. Horati Flacci opera* (Turin 1959); and F. Villeneuve, *Horace: Épîtres* (with M. A. Bourguery, Paris 1964). For the scholia see O. Keller, *Pseudacronis scholia in Horatium vetustiora* 2 (Leipzig 1902) 216–22; A. Holder, *Pomponi Porphyronis Commentum in Horatium Flaccum* (Innsbruck 1894; repr. Hildesheim 1967) 320–22; and H. J. Botschuyver, *Scholia in Horatium* λφψ (Amsterdam 1935) 348–51.

For a general bibliography on Horace, see T. E. Wright, in *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1968), 399–405. For *Epistles* 1.2 I have found the following helpful: R. Bentley, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* (3rd ed., Amsterdam 1728) 547–54; C. Anthon, *Q. Horatii Flacci Poemata* (New York 1830) 472–77; N. E. Lemaire, *Quintus Horatius Flaccus* (Paris 1831) 2.270–77; J. Orelli, J. Baiter, W. Mewes, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* (Berlin 1892) 2.316–29; G. T. A. Krüger, *Des Q. Horatius Flaccus Satiren und Episteln: II. Episteln* (ed. 13 by Gustav Krüger, Leipzig 1894) 19–26 (for the earlier literature on *Epist.* 1.2 see pp. 196–97); E. C. Wickham, *Horace* (Oxford 1903) 2.191–97; A. S. Wilkins, *The Epistles of Horace* (London 1885, repr. 1955) 97–107; A. Campbell, *Horace: A New Interpretation* (London 1924) 274–77; A. Oltramare, *Les Origines de la diatribe romaine* (Geneva 1926) 138–52; J. Rolfe, *Horace: Epistles* (1934, repr. 1960) 347–53; O. A. W. Dilke, *Horace: Epistles Book I* (London 1954; 2nd ed. 1961) 79–83; E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957, repr. 1966) 314–16; A. Kiessling, R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Briefe* (ed. E. Burck, Berlin 1959) 22–36; G. Stégen, *Essai sur la composition de cinq épîtres d'Horace* (Namur 1960) 36–50; H. Musurillo, *Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry* (New York 1961) 30–31; O. Luschkat, "Horaz, Epistel 1, 2," *Theologia Viatorum* 9 (1963) 142–55; A. Deman, "Horace, Epîtres I, 2, 17–26," *RBP* 42 (1964) 1419 (suggests that *immersabilis undis* is based on Pindar, *Pyth.* 2.79–80).

For the text I have accepted *planus* (4) and *quid Paris?* (10), on which see the comments of R. Bentley; also *cessatum ducere curam* (31) against Bentley's *cessantem ducere somnum*; and *podagrum* (52). I have had the advantage of discussing the text with Herbert Musurillo S.J., of Fordham University.

schoolroom philosophers. Lollius Maximus was a young man who was studying rhetoric at Rome, and, even though Horace calls him *puer* (*Epist.* 1.2.68), he is most probably to be identified with the Lollius of *Epist.* 1.18, who had already campaigned in the Cantabrian War in 25–24 B.C.² In the present epistle, at any rate, Horace treats him as a very young man, in using the famous analogy of the newly-made vase which retains the odor of the first liquid that is poured into it (69–70). The letter becomes, as many scholars have seen,³ an exhortation to moral living in the manner of the Stoic-Cynic diatribe. Its central message is man's natural need of discipline and self-control: unrestrained passion brings its own sanction and penalties (55–67). Thus Horace picks up the theme that he initiated in *Epist.* 1.1.41–42 to Maecenas:

virtus est vitium fugere et sapientia prima
stultitia caruisse.

The rules of good men are not completely arbitrary, but somehow based on the limits of man's nature.⁴ In this way Horace resumes in the first two epistles the *ars recte vivendi* (*Epist.* 1.2.41), which his father first taught him as a young man.⁵ Indeed, part of the charm of *Epist.* 1.2 is that Horace is now playing the same rôle as moral tutor to Lollius which his father played to him. One of Horace's main tenets is that the clue to right living may be found in the ideals we learned as children.⁶

It is strange that, despite the many commentators and critics who have studied the epistle, few have discussed in any detail the problem of its unity, that is, the connection between the two major sections.

² See K. Fluss, "Lollius Maximus," *RE* 13 (1927) 1389–90. Fluss identifies the Lollius Maximus of *Epist.* 1.2 with the Lollius of *Epist.* 1.18, even though the latter had already fought under Augustus in Spain. At the same time he rightly does not see any necessary connection with M. Lollius, the consul of 21 B.C., on whom see Groag, *RE* 13 (1927) 1377–87, and Kiessling-Heinze, *Horaz: Oden und Epoden* (Berlin 1960) 435. That Lollius Maximus also became consul "by Caesar's favor," as Pseudo-Acron says, on *Epist.* 1.18.1 (ed. Keller, p. 266.14–15), is uncertain. August Meineke was apparently the first to understand *maximus* not as a *cognomen* but meaning "eldest": see Krüger 196.

³ See the remarks of Kiessling-Heinze, p. 23.

⁴ See for example *Satires* 1.1.106–7.

⁵ See *Satires* 1.4.105–6, 1.6.82–88.

⁶ See *Epist.* 1.1.59–60: "at pueri ludentes, 'rex eris,' aiunt, / 'si recte facies.'"

For it is clear that it is divided into two parts, the first on Homer as the archetypal moral teacher (1-31), the second a series of moral *dicta* on the art of right living (32-71), but it is not at first evident how these two parts are to be united. In part I, young Lollius' study of rhetoric at Rome is the occasion for Horace's meditation on the moral grandeur of Homer, whom he has been rereading at Praeneste (1-5):

Troiani belli scriptorem, Maxime Lolli,
dum tu declamas Romae, Praeneste relegi;
qui quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
planus ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.
cur ita crediderim, nisi quid te distinet, audi.

It is interesting to note that the theme of Horace's epistle can also be found in a work on *The Allegories of Homer* (*Ὅμηρικὰ προβλήματα*) by Heraclitus, a writer very probably of the first century B.C. He writes:⁷

Straightway from the earliest age children in their first studies are nursed on Homer's doctrine, and indeed even in our swaddling clothes we nourish our souls, as it were, on the milk of his verses. To each of us he is present at the beginning, and also as we grow more and more adult; during our mature years Homer comes to perfection, and even in our old age he never sates us, but even though we have left him off, we thirst for him again. One might almost say that men have not done with Homer until they have done with life.

And of Odysseus, Heraclitus says:⁸

All the wandering of Odysseus, if one would examine it accurately, is an entire allegory. For Homer has created in Odysseus, as it were, an embodiment of all virtue, hating as he does all the vices that have made man's life savage.

In any case, Horace's comments are among the first full-scale discussions in literature of the allegorical interpretation of Homer.⁹

⁷ Félix Buffière, *Héraclite: Allégories d'Homère* (Paris 1962) 1.5-7, pp. 1-2. For a discussion of Heraclitus' date, see Buffière, pp. ix-x. Heraclitus gives the standard ancient definition, "We call allegory that figure by which, while one thing is spoken of, another is intended" (5.1, Buffière, p. 4).

⁸ 70.1, Buffière, p. 75.

⁹ See Campbell 276-77 and J. Tate, "Allegory, Greek," in *OCD* 38; cf. also the remarks of Orelli-Baiter-Mewes 2.316, J. F. D'Alton, *Horace and His Age* (repr. New York 1962) 133, and Oltramare 145. St. Basil, in an address written for his nephews, writes,

Actually Horace gives us not so much an allegorical interpretation as a moral one; the characters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do not stand for definite personal or spiritual qualities, but rather Horace, like Heraclitus, sees a general tone of deeper moral meaning implied in the texture of each work. As Horace explains to Lollius (6-8):

fabula, qua Paridis propter narratur amorem
Graecia barbariae lento collisa duello,
stultorum regum et populorum continet aestus.

Thus the *Iliad* portrays the folly of passion and the evil effects that follow *sedition*, *dolus*, *scelus*, *libido* (*amor*), and *ira* (15-16).

In Horace's diptych, the *Odyssey* forms a natural counterpiece (17-31): it is the tale of the good man emerging victorious through the temptations and trials of life:

rursus, quid virtus et quid sapientia possit,
utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen.

There are, as is well known, two almost contradictory traditions on Ulysses in Horace. At times he is *duplex* (*Odes* 1.6.7), and *dolosus* (*Sat.* 2.5.3), the wily schemer whom Teiresias finds an apt pupil in the vicious *ars senes captandi* of *Sat.* 2.5. But then there is the figure of the good Ulysses, *inclitus* (*Sat.* 2.3.197), *patiens* (*Epist.* 1.7.40), and *laboriosus* (*Epodes* 17.16), the *utile exemplar* of *Epist.* 1.2, and a Stoic saint to rival the virtue of Hercules. Both Ulysses-types must have been familiar from the Stoic-Cynic diatribe; in any case, they both descend from Homer's ambiguous portrait, and are already diversified in Sophocles: we may compare the rational Odysseus of the *Ajax*, the friend of Athena, with the unscrupulous plotter of the *Philoctetes*.¹⁰

"all of Homer's poetry is in praise of virtue"; and of the naked Odysseus, "he was covered with virtue instead of clothing": *To Young Men* 6 (ed. R. J. Deferrari, London 1950, 4.394). Thus it was natural that *Epist.* 1.2 was frequently quoted by the Fathers of the Christian Church, e.g. Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore of Seville: for the *testimonia* see Villeneuve 45 ff. and Klingner 244-46. On the luxury of the Phaeacians, in addition to Basil, *To Young Men* 5.7 (Deferrari, pp. 394-96) quoted by Luschnat 152, note 29, add also Heraclitus 69.7 (Buffière, p. 74).

¹⁰ On the Ulysses tradition see H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York 1957) 192 ff. and 330 ff., and especially W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*² (Oxford 1963).

Thus in *Epist.* 1.2, Ulysses, the *utile exemplar*, is held up for our admiration, whereas the sluggard, the lustful, and the sensuous man—as exemplified in Circe’s victims, the suitors of Penelope, and the court of Alcinoüs—are made unattractive and ridiculous. Cleverly varying a Homeric phrase (*Il.* 6.142), “mortals who eat the fruit of the fields,” as opposed to the immortal gods, Horace draws out the final message of the *Odyssey* from the contrast between Ulysses and all the others who do not enjoy his *sapientia et virtus* (27–31):

nos numerus sumus et fruges consumere nati,
sponsi Penelopae, nebulones, Alcinoïque
in cute curanda plus aequo operata iuventus,
cui pulchrum fuit in medios dormire dies et
ad strepitum citharae cessatum ducere curam.¹¹

Yet here Horace is ambiguous; for it is not clear whether he is saying that all men are insignificant ciphers, or only those who live foolishly for the fruit of the earth, pampering themselves instead of living for virtue. In any case, *nos numerus sumus* (27) applies to all mankind, and the double meaning is unnoticed until we hear the sequel, when the lines are especially applied to the suitors and the youth of Alcinoüs’ court.

Among the few who have discussed the problem of the *Epistle*’s unity, Otto Luschnat¹² has attempted to associate Horace’s epistle with a didactic type of treatise for youth reflected especially in Plutarch’s *How a Young Man Should Read Poetry* and Basil’s *To Young Men*; the second section he tries to relate to the Greek *gnomologium*, or collection of moral maxims, although he admits that we have no evidence that such a collection was ever associated with Homer.

After drawing out the lessons of the *Odyssey*, Horace very abruptly turns to his moral sermon, which begins with the Stoic analogy between bodily sickness and the passions.¹³ Horace’s message finds an interesting parallel in the first-century Jewish writer Philo, *Quod*

¹¹ See also Musurillo 31. The best reading of line 31 would seem to be *cessatum ducere curam* (adopted by Garrod, Dilke, and others, against Klingner). The problem is discussed with great clarity by G. Stégen, *Essai* 38–39. There is also a good note in Dilke 81; for the earlier discussion, see Krüger 197.

¹² See above, note 1.

¹³ See the references in J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* 4 (Leipzig 1924) 101; see also Oltramare 143–45, with the sources cited.

omnis probus liber sit 12; here Philo, adapting the disease-analogy, comments on the foolishness of those men who do not use the same prudence in spiritual things as sick men who consult a doctor: "For they indeed entrust themselves with eagerness to their medical doctors, whereas the others hesitate to throw off the disease of the soul, that is, ignorance, by consorting with philosophers."¹⁴ Horace begins with a long, stirring exhortation to engage without delay in curing the diseases of the soul (31-43); its central theme is expressed in the proverb *dimidium facti qui habet . . . / incipe* (40-41), and the psychological preparedness here stressed is seen as a necessary prelude to any successful war on the passions. Luschnat is perhaps right in connecting this section with ancient lists of moral maxims inherited from the philosophers. Horace, however, next embarks on a discussion of the natural sanctions of passion: especially *avaritia* (44-53, 56), *voluptas* (= lust, 55; cf. 13, 37, *amor*), *invidia* (37, 57-58), and *ira* (and *dolor*, 59-63), which he calls *furor brevis* (62). Horace then concludes with three images designed to help young Lollius understand the process of self-discipline: they are the training of a young colt (64-65), the raising of hunting dogs (65-67), and the philosophic image of the new vase (69-70; cf. 54). In typical Horatian fashion he brings his serious discourse to a sudden stop by a jesting reference to himself and to his reluctance to go either too fast or too slow on the path of moral virtue (70-71):¹⁵

quodsi cessas aut strenuus anteis,
nec tardum opprior nec praecedentibus insto.

Earlier critics have missed the subtle links which bind together parts I and II. The reading of Homer is not merely the occasion of a moral sermon for the edification of Lollius. Rather it is clear that Horace believes that the very cure of the passions is effected by the

¹⁴ *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 12 (Cohn-Wendland 6 [Berlin 1906] 4.2-4). On Philo's ambiguous relationship to the Stoics, see especially H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge 1948) 1.111-12; and on Philo's concept of learning as a part of virtue, 2.259-66. On the disease-analogy see also Luschnat 150, notes 24-25.

¹⁵ Kiessling-Heinze are wrong to see the epistle as a generic statement and to restrict the poem's personal reference merely to lines 1-2 and 70-71; see Fraenkel's brief reply in *Horace* 315, and the discussion in Luschnat 145, 154.

reading of good literature, of which Homer is the most pre-eminent (34-37):

et nī
posces ante diem librum lumine, si non
intendes animum studiis et rebus honestis,
invidia vel amore vigil torquebere.

For Horace true poetry always has to some extent a philosophic content.¹⁶ Indeed, in the lines quoted, it is almost as if the *liber* brought before dawn brings the *lumen* by which man can quell the forces of *invidia* and *amor*. Thus lines 34-37, at the opening of part II, show the connection between Homer and the program of self-discipline which Horace urges upon Lollius. But a further source of unity emerges if we consider the last of the three images which Horace uses at the close of the epistle (69-70):

quo semel est imbuta recens, servabit odorem
testa diu.

Indeed, he has earlier prepared for it in line 54: *sincerum est nisi vas quodcumque infundis acescit*. Once again we find a parallel in Philo, where he speaks of the importance of the first moral impressions received by the young mind:¹⁷

It is proper, then, that the youth universally devote the first fruits of their age to nothing else than education, in which it is seemly that they grow mature and age. Just as new vases, they say, always give forth the fragrance of what was first put in them, so too the minds of children, once molded by the ineradicable impressions of their senses, are not overwhelmed by the flood of things that later impinge on them, but constantly present their original form.

¹⁶ See *Ars Poetica* 309: "scribendae recte sapere est et principium et fons." But Wilkinson feels that this preoccupation was a later development: see L. P. Wilkinson, *Horace and His Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge 1951) 105-6. On poetry as a healing incantation see Musurillo 30. Luschnat (149-51) has attempted to discover the source of many of the maxims in part II of the epistle, and relates some of them to the fragments of Epicurus.

¹⁷ *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 15 (Cohn-Wendland 6.4.14-18).

We find a similar image in Quintilian:¹⁸

Et natura tenacissimi sumus eorum, quae rudibus animis percepimus; ut sapor, quo nova imbuas, durat, nec lanarum colores, quibus simplex ille candor mutatus est, elui possunt. Et haec ipsa magis pertinaciter haerent, quo deteriora sunt.

The early education of youth, in this ancient commonplace, was compared to the pouring of a good wine into a freshly-made earthenware vase; for then the porous surface of the vase tended to keep the bouquet of the better wine, even though it might later be used to hold a vintage of poorer quality. For Horace, human nature with its limits, weaknesses, and evil tendencies is the vase. It is up to men to discover what is right; and preferably the process should begin in youth when we are subject "to our betters" (68). Thus in the epistle Homer stands for the good wine which is poured in while the vase is still fresh (*sincerum*, 54). The principles represented by Homer are, in a sense, the embodiment of man's youthful ideals, when his vision is clear and uncluttered. Like the children's jingle of *Epist.* 1.1.60–61, *rex eris si recte facies*, these early lessons embody profound insights that are not appreciated by the young but only later on. In any case, it is to these a man should adhere all through life, even when the vase becomes cracked, leaky, and soiled.¹⁹ Horace in *Epist.* 1.2 touches on a truth that is as simple as it is profound: it is that the fresh, unspoiled instincts and high ideals of youth, supported by the literature that early nourished them, are sometimes man's surest guide in his adult years. It is a message that still retains its urgency and relevance today.

The meaning of the epistle becomes clearer when we realize that it represents the confrontation between old age and youth, Horace and Lollius, the old vase and the new. And yet, Horace is convinced that the ideals of his youth—the ancient *dicta* instilled by his father—are ultimately those that carried him through life (*Sat.* 1.4.105–6):

¹⁸ *Inst. orat.* 1.1.5. Cf. also the image of the *vas* in Lucretius 6.17, with the note of C. Bailey (Oxford 1947) 3.1556–57.

¹⁹ Cf. *Satires* 1.3.55–56: "at nos virtutes ipsas invertimus atque / *sincerum* cupimus vas incrustare." The image of the *vas* has thus developed from the time of Horace's first book of *Satires*; there it is merely a question of attributing faults to those who are really virtuous.

insuevit pater optimus hoc me,
ut fugerem exemplis vitiorum quaeque notando.

It is this youthful idealism, here embodied (so Horace feels) in the poetry of Homer, that he wishes to hold up before his young friend.

To sum up, therefore, our analysis of *Epist.* 1.2 reveals a new source of unity for the poem which bridges the gap between the two sections. Like *Epist.* 1.1, it is a continuation of the moral protreptic theme against the background of the contrast between youth and age. In *Epist.* 1.1, Horace shows that, though he had now given up the poetry of his youth, he was more seriously attracted to a study of the *ars recte vivendi* whose principles he had learned as a boy. In *Epist.* 1.2, the fact that he addresses himself to young Lollius Maximus makes the confrontation between age and youth all the sharper. Horace's Homer is not merely the textbook of the schools; it holds the secret of moral living for old and young, if only one could penetrate its meaning. The *Iliad*, as the first panel of the diptych, is the poem of rash youth, reflecting the negative side of the problem: the *ira* and *amor* of Achilles, Paris, and Agamemnon, and the sins of their peoples, Greeks and Trojans alike. The *Odyssey*, in the other panel, is the poem of mature wisdom, the story of passion quelled and overcome in the person of Ulysses. We have thus the five proportions:

Iliad:Odyssey
Ulixes duplex:Ulixes patiens
youth:old age
fresh vase:old vase
Lollius:Horace

Thus, the links that bind the two parts of the epistle are (1) the implicit lessons which Homer's two epics bring to man besieged by passion; (2) the theory that literature, and especially Homer, can be a strong ally in man's moral conflict (34-37); and lastly, (3) the image of the *testa recens* (69-70; cf. 54). Homer is like the good wine to be poured into the newly-molded vase. Horace, though now a man of mature years, realizes the truth of the old *dicta* which had been handed down by many ancient philosophers. As his own father, though a *libertinus*, taught him simple moral precepts ("sic me / formabat puerum dictis," *Sat.* 1.4.120-21), so now Horace teaches Lollius.

But it is Homer now that binds youth and age, just as it binds both sections of the poem, the book to be assimilated in youth when one is subject to one's betters. Indeed, in Lollius, Horace perhaps sees his own youth, guided as he was by his austere father. For Horace now there is no further answer to be given to the problem of human life; the principles are clear, we have only to put them into practice. Yet (70-71),

But if you halt or boldly dash ahead,
I shall not wait nor shall I try to win.

For Horace, as ever, was never inclined to go to excess.