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VIRTUS RE-FORMED:  
AN “AESTHETIC RESPONSE” READING  
OF HORACE, *ODES* III 2

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I

“Virtue is splendid; and loyal discretion is nice, too.” This overly-condensed, admittedly distorted summary of Horace, *Odes* III 2 will serve to pinpoint what generations of scholars have taken to be its crucial problem. The two stanzas (seven and eight) devoted to *fidele silentium*, coming as they do immediately after the description in stanza six of the climactic ascent of *virtus* toward heaven, constitute an anticlimax verging on a *non sequitur*. The traditional scholarly approach has been to try to divine what missing link was present, unexpressed, in the poet’s mind when he composed this puzzling sequence. Kiessling-Heinze, Pasquali and Collinge fairly well represent the spectrum of interpretation in recent times.

The Kiessling-Heinze edition of the *Odes* and *Epodes*<sup>1</sup> is typical of the mainstream view in regarding *fidele silentium* as a second human quality which stands in some relation to the human quality *virtus*. The introduction and notes to the ode present *fidele silentium* as a modest but acceptable alternative to hardwon *virtus*: true and exceptional manliness (*virtus*), attained through the rigors of military service, is rewarded with heaven; but for ordinary mortals observance of divine sanctions (*fidele silentium*) will at least ward off divine retribution—provided one avoids the company of sinners.

<sup>1</sup> A. Kiessling and R. Heinze (eds.), *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Oden und Epoden* (Berlin 1960)<sup>10</sup> 256–61. Cf. also V. Pöschl, *Horaz und die Politik* (Heidelberg 1963) 22–24, who discerns in the ode three modes of life, all meritorious, with apolitical *virtus* standing midway between the public role of the military hero and the quiet, Epicurean ideal of *fidele silentium*. It is perhaps worth mentioning that E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957), has no word to say about this ode although he discusses the other five of the so-called “Roman cycle.”

For Pasquali *fidele silentium* is equivalent to an aposiopesis at the brink of a forbidden apocalypse: "Virtue is splendid and merits heaven—but hush! I must not reveal the secrets of the divine mysteries."<sup>2</sup> Pasquali regarded this and the related ode, I 18, as important evidence that the cult of Ceres and Bacchus was thriving in Augustan Rome and that Horace was an active devotee.

My chief objection to these interpretations-by-explanation is that they impose a specious unity on the poem at the cost of serious disregard for and distortion of Horace's own words. To Collinge, on the other hand, the ode is characteristic of Horace's lack of concern for strict unity of form:

... Horace has an (almost Euripidean) inclination to insert or add certain passages which are aphoristic in content and complete in themselves, but which are quite extraneous to the poem's strict design. . . . (A)fter praising the cultivation of *virtus* for most of iii.2 . . . , the poet (borrowing from Simonides) commends in the last two stanzas somewhat less rugged qualities—a careful tongue, due observance of the gods, and the understanding that crime does not (usually) pay.<sup>3</sup>

## II

The interpretation I am about to propose differs radically, in both procedures and results, from all previous interpretations of this ode. Some preliminary justification seems to be in order. The phrase "aesthetic response" in my subtitle refers to the literary theory of Wolfgang Iser, whose two books, *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*, analyze the modern novel from the point of view of the responses which a given text elicits in a competent reader.<sup>4</sup> He shows that there are fundamental differences, from author to author and from period to period, in the role assigned to the reader by the text. His conclusions prove to be surprisingly relevant to *Odes* III 2 despite the vast differences between it and the novel.

In order to adapt Iser's conclusions as expeditiously as possible to our own purpose, let us imagine a two-dimensional graph on which one might arrange any desired selection of literary works according to only two criteria. Let the vertical scale represent the degree of active participation

<sup>2</sup> G. Pasquali, *Orazio lirico* (Florence 1920) 1–18 (on I 18); 667–81 (on III 2). A similar interpretation has just been published: G. Davis, "Silence and Decorum: Encomiastic Convention and the Epilogue of Horace *Carm.* 3.2," *CA* 2 (1983) 9–26, who sees *fidele silentium* as a recourse to a traditional encomiastic *topos*, the injunction against excessive praise. Davis's article contains a useful survey of previous interpretations (10–13).

<sup>3</sup> N. E. Collinge, *The Structure of Horace's Odes* (London/N.Y./Oxford 1961) 101–2.

<sup>4</sup> I have freely and selectively adapted (I hope without undue distortion) concepts and terms from the more theoretical of these two works, W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore/London 1978; originally published in German 1976).

required of the reader, with passive reception of a message or passive absorption in an illusion at the bottom (or zero) end, and at the top active grappling with textual obstacles and creative (though guided) filling of gaps in the flow of thought. Then let the horizontal scale represent the degree to which the text either reinforces or challenges the accepted norms, assumptions and expectations of the reader and his society, with reassuring texts at the left (or zero) end, and thoroughly discomfiting, subversive ones on the extreme right.

If we were to arrange the same selection of texts along each of these two scales with points of correlation, the resulting graph line would probably be a fairly straight diagonal from bottom left to top right; or in other words, these two characteristics (reader involvement and subversion of norms)<sup>5</sup> would show a high degree of correlation.

Whether or not the diagonal would actually work out as I predict is immaterial, since the sole point of this exercise is to enable me to state a proposition basic to my interpretation: that Horace, *Odes* III 2 belongs, on our graph line, much farther along in the top right direction than has ever been suspected. Previous assumptions that its proper place was at or near the zero angle are not surprising, for that is where classical texts are generally (and perhaps mistakenly) assumed to belong; the two characteristics in question are usually associated with the works of such modern innovators as Joyce, Eliot, and Faulkner and of a few such deviant spirits of earlier times as, say, Blake and Sterne.

Texts which differ radically from one another in these two ways require radically different modes of reading. Iser's analysis of these modes, especially of the more demanding and active kind, in *The Act of Reading* provided me with unexpected solutions at a crucial point in my struggles with III 2, the point at which separate firm convictions had crystallized but I had reached an impasse as to how to fit them together.

In marshalling my arguments, I have used as my organizing principle Iser's distinction between, and his (necessarily arbitrary) definitions of, two vexed terms, "meaning" and "significance."<sup>6</sup> In section III, I shall analyze the ode's "meaning," the product of the reader's encounter with the text itself; and in sections IV and V, its "significance," the absorption of the meaning into the reader's own experience. Meaning is achieved when, largely by trial and error and on the basis of built-in linguistic signals, the reader has solved the problems of the text and a recognizably coherent structure has emerged. Significance is an extra-textual structure of associations, which in a poem dealing, as III 2 does, with matters of public interest may be deeply enmeshed in contemporary values and

<sup>5</sup> The norms subverted may range from literary conventions to accepted standards of politics, morality, and religion.

<sup>6</sup> See Iser 150-51; and, more fully, sections III and IV, 107-231.

events, even if the text makes no specific allusion to them. These associations are conjured up by textual signals, but they must be *supplied* by the reader himself from his own experience of his milieu.

Iser ends the introductory chapter of *The Act of Reading* with these words:

Far more instructive [than explicating a single message] will be an analysis of what actually happens when one is reading a text, for that is when a text begins to unfold its potential; it is in the reader that the text comes to life, and this is true even when the 'meaning' has become so historical that it is no longer relevant to us. In reading we are able to experience things that no longer exist and to understand things that are totally unfamiliar to us; and it is this astonishing process that now needs to be investigated. (19)

### III

I shall try now to show this astonishing process at work in the case of Horace, *Odes* III 2.

How do stanzas one to six unfold themselves to the reader? The first three recommend military service as a means of building character, and praise the courage of the soldier intrepid in battle. Four celebrates the glory of dying for one's country. In five and six the character training is shown as having paid off: the resultant *virtus*, having achieved superiority to ordinary mortals, ascends heavenward to his well-deserved reward; the sentence almost phrases itself in this way because it is impossible to think of *virtus* as unembodied in a human person. The word *virtus* combines two sets of connotations in an uncertain or suspended relationship: the military tenor of one to four suggests the narrower meaning "valor" or "heroism," while the context of the *virtus* stanzas themselves seems to expand the word to include all moral perfection. Any half-conscious doubts or questions the reader may experience—what, for example, has ferocity in battle to do with *angustam pauperiem pati*?—are overridden by the inspirational, laudatory tendency of the passage as a whole.

A laudatory poem is an encomium, and the conventions of the genre arouse the expectation that the embodiment of all this glory—a hero who combines the qualities of Homeric warrior and Stoic sage—will be named or otherwise identified in the final stanza if not sooner. It seems hardly necessary to defend this statement. Earlier modern scholars took the poem to be an encomium of Augustus. Their views went out of fashion, no doubt because it proved impossible to reconcile the genre "encomium" with the last two stanzas, in which no hero is named, the subject is abruptly changed, and the ode ends on a note of crime and punishment. The fact remains, however, that the poem *starts* as an encomium. The frustration of the relevant expectations is one of the oddities which require explanation, and which any valid hypothesis about the poem

must take into account. A familiar norm—generic convention—is evoked only to be subverted. To what end?<sup>7</sup>

There are several other noteworthy features—we may call them “facts” to be accounted for—in these last two stanzas. For the sake of clarity I present them as a list:

1. As has been universally noted, the introduction of *fidele silentium* is anticlimactic and incongruous after the imminent apotheosis of *virtus*.
2. There is an abrupt shift from the impersonal, generally abstract tone of lines 1–25 to a vehement first-person singular beginning with *vetabo* in line 26.
3. What the poet says in lines 25–29 is, to be precise, not “One must not betray a secret” or “I will not betray a secret” but “I will have nothing to do with a person who has betrayed a secret.” The specificity of the crime, in combination with the shift from abstract to personal, from (I submit) public image to private conduct, argues that we are dealing with an allusion to an actual scandal of the time.<sup>8</sup>
4. Although the subject of the last two stanzas is generally said to be *fidele silentium*, almost seven of these eight lines are devoted to a specific transgression against it.

I maintain that these features, along with the frustration of deliberately aroused encomiastic expectations, are purposeful devices intended to disorient the reader, thus alerting his attention and causing him to question his own assumptions: “I thought this was going to be an encomium. I must not have been paying attention.” The only thing to do is to go back and reread, or ask for a rereading of, the first part of the poem.<sup>9</sup>

What I am proposing is this: that, if we call the first six stanzas A and the last two B, the complete form of the ode may be described as ABA', with the disorienting shocks in B serving as a reprise sign for a

<sup>7</sup> I cannot agree with Davis (above, note 2) that the last two stanzas in fact employ a conventional generic *topos*—the injunction against excessive praise—to round off the poem. Neither Horace's language in stanzas seven and eight nor the Pindaric passages cited as precedents for a *topos* seem to me to be relevant to the bestowal of praise.

<sup>8</sup> The crime is incongruously specific (as balanced against the sweeping abstraction *virtus*) whether the betrayal of mystic secrets is to be understood literally or as a traditional paradigm for any act of criminal indiscretion (as for example in Callimachus, *Aetia* III, fr.75.4 Pf.).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Iser (above, note 4) 89:

[Deviation] . . . enhances the semantic potential of the text, which thus produces a special kind of tension: the violation is transformed into an irritation, which begins to draw attention to itself. . . . Its function is to mobilize the reader's attention . . . it is bound up with the expectations of the reader, the thwarting of which will lead much further than the mere production of a semantic potential.

reconsideration of A. This new reading will be quite different from the first, since we now have a new frame of reference: the scandal involving a trespass against *fidele silentium*.<sup>10</sup>

Before undertaking this reconsideration of A, however, we would do well to linger over these last two stanzas—for it is here that the reader is stopped short in his passive acceptance of the poem's message—to pay heed to a matter we have so far neglected: linguistic signs—recurrent motifs, eccentric diction, metaphor, imagery, and the like—of the sort that by attracting attention to themselves give promise of revealing the mostly invisible framework that gives the poem a coherent shape. Let us make the following an addition to our list of the noteworthy features of B (stanzas seven and eight):

5. Certain features of the diction draw attention to themselves. The word *fideli* is the poet's own addition to the original Simonidean tag, ἐστὶ καὶ σιγῆς ἀκίνδυνον γέρας; Horace must attach some importance to the notion of loyalty here. Less obvious is the difference in the implications of ἀκίνδυνον γέρας and *tuta merces*. The Greek phrase in this context connotes a gratuitous benefit gained without risk. *Merces*, on the other hand, implies a binding agreement between at least two parties; it is the gain accruing from the fulfillment of such a contract. It is *tuta* because it is guaranteed by sanctions against non-fulfillment. The poet, for his own reasons (as we shall eventually see), evokes the Simonidean tag by what looks like a close translation; but on more careful examination the distortions throw into relief the connotations of reciprocity that are absent from the original.

The motif of loyalty or reciprocal obligation appears again in the closing lines of the ode, where *Poena* is wryly spoken of in terms befitting a loyal friend: *raro scelestum deseruit Poena*. Human bonds figure also in 26–29, where the poet, speaking in the first person, repudiates all association with the culprit; he draws metaphorical boundaries around himself and shuts the sinner out. The “boundary” motif in turn may be seen in the word *volgarit* (26), which implies that something which ought to be confined has been spread abroad.

On the basis of these observations (arbitrarily confined to stanzas seven and eight), we can propose a tentative thematic framework in which boundaries and human bonds are the dominant elements. Both are forms of restriction or limitation, but they are not quite equivalent or

<sup>10</sup> Iser (above, note 4) 149:

A second reading of the text will never have the same effect as the first, for the simple reason that the originally assembled meaning is bound to influence the second reading.

interchangeable. Consider this as a blueprint for a coherent linguistic theme: those who recognize or inhabit the same boundaries are not only confined but also defined and united by them. The bonds that unite them and make the association viable may be generically described as *fides*, and *fides* in turn implies not only obligations and mutual responsibilities between those whom it binds but also a dedication to the boundaries themselves.

*Silentium* according to this scheme is the bond or contract that unites those who honor the boundary between the speakable and the unspeakable. It is *fidele* because it is a species of *fides*; observance of *silentium* is a social obligation. He who transgresses the boundary severs the bond. He becomes an infidel, a source of pollution; the poet casts him outside of *his* boundaries and explains why this is necessary. In that boundless outer space the culprit will be hounded by an inescapable pursuer, *Poena*, who will eventually succeed in drawing tight the noose that binds him to her. Even single words suggest possibilities of the binding and loosing of separate units: *trabibus*, *fragilem*, *solvat*, *addidit*, and with a contrary force *integrum*.

If we look again at stanzas one to six (without yet embarking upon our radical rereading of them) we can see the boundary/bond motifs now much in evidence. *Angustam pauperiem* connotes narrowly defined limitation of resources and consequent restriction of freedom. The force of the obtrusively eccentric word *amice* emerges: *Angusta pauperies* is to be accepted in a spirit of friendship and loyalty. It is a bond uniting those committed to a way of life which imposes narrow limitations. In the context of its own sentence, that commitment is to the deprivation and danger of military service, including the imminent possibility of death.

Looking at the first six stanzas on a broader scale, we find that, especially in four to six, the dominant motif is human mortality, the insuperable boundary (*negata via*, 22) between earth and heaven. In stanza four, warriors especially, but by extension all mortals, must accept the inevitability of death; *Mors* is the inescapable pursuer, the enforcer of the boundary. According to our scheme, it follows that mortals, united by their common mortality, are tied together by bonds of *fides*. It is the boundary and the bonds of mortality that *virtus* strives to transcend in stanza six.

It is time for a close reconsideration of stanzas one to six, preparatory to the rereading which we are going to label A'. I begin by calling attention to certain noteworthy features, which I add to the list of those already noted in B (stanzas seven and eight).

6. The poet himself is entirely absent from these stanzas. Without stopping to argue it here, I would remark that, except for the opening line and most of stanza four, the attitudes expressed are

alien to Horace's known system of values. The tone of detachment is fortified by the prevalence of aphorisms and literary echoes (fully documented in the standard commentaries) which on the first reading numb the reader's perceptions by lending an air of authority, even of incontrovertibility, to the sentiments.<sup>11</sup>

7. The opening motif—willing endurance of restrictive deprivation—is gradually modified until in stanza six we are faced with a complete reversal of the initial ideal: a human soul is seen eschewing human bonds (*coetus vulgaris spernit*) and struggling to deny the most universal limitation of all, human mortality. It should be noted that although commentaries and translations invariably take *negata via* as “by a way denied (to others)” the phrase is in fact unmodified: the way is forbidden.<sup>12</sup>
8. There are certain “gaps” or “blanks” (to use Iser's terms) in the sequence of ideas—less obvious than that between *virtus* and *fidele silentium* but still worthy of notice: (a) The ideal of

<sup>11</sup> Iser 79:

The literary allusions are functional, not merely imitative. . . . Although . . . they open up familiar territory, they also ‘quote’ earlier answers to the problems—answers which no longer constitute a valid meaning for the present work, but which offer a form of orientation by means of which the new meaning may perhaps be found.

Although the commentaries on the *Odes* provide no very close equivalents from earlier literature to the famous *dulce et decorum* tag, I would include it among the “quotations” of this passage, partly on the grounds of its allusive context, but even more because the expression of the thought (though not, perhaps, the thought itself) is so thoroughly un-Horatian.

<sup>12</sup> There are literary and philosophical precedents for two contrasting (though not necessarily contradictory) attitudes toward the notion of immortality as a reward for an exceptionally virtuous mortal life. Editors cite Cicero especially, on the Stoic idea that such a reward was possible. See also L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, Conn. 1931) 52–54.

The more negative view questions not so much the possibility of immortality as the nature of human aspirations to immortality, and it tends to equate immortality with divinity. Horace's mentor Pindar frequently admonishes the subjects of his victory odes, “Do not try to become a god”: *O.* 5.25; *P.* 3.61; *N.* 9.46–47; *I.* 5.16; and especially *I.* 7.43–69, which tells how Pegasus threw Bellerophon as he tried to ascend to heaven and the company of Zeus. Compare with this the following lines of Horace himself, which must be taken seriously despite their (probably) half-playful context:

expertus vacuum Daedalus aera  
pennis non homini datis; . . .  
caelum ipsum petimus stultitia, neque  
per nostrum patimur scelus  
iracunda Iovem ponere fulmina.

(*Odes* I 3.34–35; 38–40)

The phrase *fugiente penna* may be taken as a reminder of both of these catastrophic assaults upon heaven. The positive, Stoic connotations of heaven prevail on the first reading of stanzas one to six, the negative on the second.

*angusta pauperies* in line 1 is dropped in favor of ferocity in battle. (b) As Commager points out, “. . . the famous *dulce et decorum* . . . loses something of its luster when we read on and find that flight is impractical as well as ignoble.”<sup>13</sup> (c) The leap from military heroism to implications of moral perfection at lines 16–17 is sufficiently wide to have led some scholars to treat the two *virtus* stanzas as a separate part of the poem.

This is how Iser (above, note 4) explains the function of “blanks” in a textual structure (182–83):

. . . the blank . . . designates a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns. . . . It is only when the schemata of the text are related to one another that the imaginary object can begin to be formed, and it is the blanks that get this connecting operation under way. They indicate that the different segments of the text *are* to be connected, even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text, and . . . they . . . trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part.

To illustrate how I would deal with this (by now rather long) set of observations, I offer a very free rereading of A (stanzas one to six), that necessarily different reading which will yield the structure ABA' proposed on page 223 above. This version does not replace the overt, encomiastic first reading; the structure is ABA', and both readings of A are essential. My additions, omissions, and changes are intended to “defamiliarize” the content and fill in the blanks.

Since the voice of these stanzas is not the poet's own, I suggest that, purely as an interpretative device, we locate the thought process within the mind of the *puer robustus* who is urged in the first stanza to consider a military career. Willing endurance of restrictive deprivation is an ideal that awakens no response in his imagination, but thoughts of horse and spear, wide open spaces and danger are stimulating. My version begins at *illum ex moenibus*:

It might not be a bad life, when you think about it. What a figure you'd cut, out there on the battlefield! The enemy's women-folk, like those women on the walls in Homer, would almost faint with admiration, and with fear that their men won't realize what a lion you are.

Then again, you could get killed. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. Or so they say. *Decorum* is all right; no one minds a little glory—but *dulce*? Still, if your number is up, there's no point in running away. Death will get you from behind if not face-to-face, and then you'll be called a coward. Might as well go for the glory.

That's how you get to be a hero. Heroism is a clean game, not

<sup>13</sup> S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (Bloomington/London 1962) 105.

like politics;<sup>14</sup> being beaten in politics makes you feel cheap and dirty. A hero's medals don't tarnish. He's his own man. His power is for keeps; no blowing around in the breezes of popular fancy for him.

If you really make it as a hero, the sky's the limit. You're so great you just can't die. Nothing can stop you. You go soaring above the common crowds and the clammy earth until you get to heaven.

Our *puer robustus* (and now, having used him, we can abandon him) has step by step perverted the original ideal—*angustam amice pauperiem pati*—to its polar opposite: vain, self-serving ambition, which recognizes no boundaries, acknowledges no bonds. The enticements of military heroism are shown to lead to dangerous self-delusion.

Here we have the unifying principle that ties together the two parts of the poem: the inescapability of human limitations; the folly of resisting the constraints imposed on mortals by the gods, and of failing to honor the bonds that restrain mortals in their relations with one another. The man who violated the constraints of loyalty and religion—of *fidele silentium*—is by that single heinous misdeed stripped of his facade of *virtus* and seen for what he has been all along: one who does not recognize the difference between himself and the gods. If we like, we may see here the familiar Greek tragic sequence: *koros* in stanza five, *hybris* in six, and *atê* in seven. He who denies the limits of his mortality is doomed to fall into the trap of his own arrogance.

The form of the poem as it must be read—ABA'—reenacts the drama of the rise and fall of a reputation. The reader is first taken in by glittering appearances and then made to reassess his original impressions. The ode testifies to the power of language to imitate the processes of life directly: pious platitudes can conceal an unpalatable truth just as showy deeds can mask a flawed character.

#### IV

Up to this point I have been dealing with the textual "meaning" of the ode. It is time now to turn our attention to what Iser insists is the necessary complement of meaning—the extra-textual "significance," the structure of associations which the reader, in response to stimuli in the text, brings to the poem from his experience of what we are accustomed to call "the real world."<sup>15</sup> Thanks to the patient labors of generations of scholars, it is possible for us to recover many of the associations which bestowed special relevance on the ode for Horace's contemporary audience.

<sup>14</sup> As all editors point out, *repulsa* is a technical term for a political defeat.

<sup>15</sup> See pages 221–22 above, and also Iser 151, where he points out that meaning "relates to a theory of literary effect," while significance has to do with "a theory of reception, which will be rather more sociological than literary."

I am by no means the first to read the words *qui Cereris sacrum volgarit arcanae* (26–27) as clearly signalling an allusion to a contemporary scandal. Until now the allusion has been seen as an *ad hoc* illustration of the iniquity of betraying *fidele silentium*, however that phrase was interpreted, and the field for conjecture was relatively open. In our new interpretation, the archetypically “tragic” career of the culprit provides the structural framework—ABA’—of the entire ode, and his character is the key to its meaning. Our culprit must be an eminent military figure, possessed of independent power (stanza five), entertaining delusions of divinity (six), who met his downfall by committing a notorious act of indiscretion. The field of candidates is narrowed, to put it bluntly, to one.

*Odes* III 2 is generally assigned to the year 27 B.C.,<sup>16</sup> a date known also to be that of the notorious disgrace of Cornelius Gallus, intimate friend of both Octavian/Augustus and Vergil.<sup>17</sup> Those friendships alone were enough to make his name a household word, but in addition he had been raised to almost mythical status by Vergil’s treatment of him in *Eclogues* 6 and 10.<sup>18</sup>

His own achievements were by no means negligible. After gaining fame as Rome’s first elegiac poet, he abandoned literature to join Octavian in his campaign against Antony and Cleopatra. His success as a general led to his appointment by Octavian as the first prefect of the newly formed imperial province of Egypt, where he continued to exercise his military talents and his new acquired political power (unchecked by the *arbitrium popularis aerae*) in dealing with neighboring kings. These activities apparently went to his head. According to Cassius Dio (53.23), he boasted of his glory, set up statues of himself all over Egypt, and had his achievements inscribed on the pyramids.

An extant example of his hybristic behavior is provided by the stele of Philae, which describes his deeds in three languages. Near the top of the stone is an incised relief of a mounted warrior, presumably Gallus

<sup>16</sup> On the date of composition, see E. Burck’s bibliographical notes in Kiessling-Heinze 622 and especially 637.

<sup>17</sup> J.-P. Boucher, *Caius Cornélius Gallus* (Paris 1966) gives a very full account of what is known about Gallus’ life and work. The footnotes are a goldmine of primary and secondary references; I am indebted to them for many of the sources mentioned in this section.

The identification of Gallus as the culprit of stanzas seven and eight was first suggested by A. von Domaszewski, *Abhandlungen zur römischen Religion* (Leipzig/Berlin 1909) 111–20, and has since been cited several times with little or no comment. P. Grimal, “Les *Odes romaines*,” *REL* 53 (1975) 135–56, accepts the identification as a basis for dating the ode. See also Boucher 49–53.

<sup>18</sup> Gallus is the only contemporary figure to appear under his own name as one of the imaginary shepherds (*Ecl.* 10) and mythological characters (*Ecl.* 6.64–73) of these poems. That is to say, Gallus had been a literary figure—a figure *in literature*—since the publication of the *Eclogues*.

himself, on a rearing steed, spear upraised to pierce a fallen enemy (cf. *equus metuendus hasta*, 4). The position of the scene is important; it appears beneath a winged solar disk, whose use was traditionally the prerogative of the divine king of Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Aspirations to absolute power and godlike immortality are (as I hope I have made clear) the central issue of *Odes* III 2.

In 27 B.C., for reasons which have remained obscure, Octavian/Augustus publicly renounced his friendship with Gallus and forbade him access to any of the imperial provinces. Various explanations are offered in such later sources as Suetonius and Cassius Dio, most of them having to do with Gallus' arrogance and his insolence toward Augustus. There can be little doubt that these were contributing factors. Establishing the historical truth about the precipitating cause is in any case outside the province of our literary interpretation. The question that concerns us is whether Gallus is the culprit whose career and character form the structural and thematic basis of our ode. His military and administrative achievements on the one hand, and his delusions of grandeur on the other, qualify him well as the exemplar of *virtus* in both its overt and its ironic meanings. The crucial question that remains is: Is there any evidence that the proximate cause of his downfall was (or was rumored to be, which will serve as well) a betrayal of *fidele silentium*? For it is the allusion to that betrayal which *ex hypothesi* sends the reader back to the beginning of the poem to discover the truth about *virtus*.

The only contemporary or nearly contemporary source which assigns a reason for Gallus' disgrace is a couplet of Ovid's which, though written long after the event, comes from the pen of one who was old enough in 27 B.C. to have heard and understood the current gossip:

non fuit opprobrio celebrasse Lycorida Gallo  
sed linguam nimio non tenuisse mero. (*Tr.* 2.445–46)

Gallus, according to Ovid, got drunk and committed a verbal indiscretion serious enough to cause his downfall.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For a description of the stele and its relief, see Boucher (above, note 17) 38–39 and the photograph facing 38.

<sup>20</sup> The arguments I have presented in my text seem to me sufficient to establish Gallus as the culprit. I would like to supplement them here with a brief description of two other contemporary texts. *Odes* I 18, an exhortation against drunkenness, ends with a passage strikingly similar to the ending of III 2 in its abjuration of the betrayer of mystic secrets, in this case of Bacchus. One who participates in drunken orgies is described as possessed of these traits:

caecus amor sui  
et tollens vacuum plus nimio gloria verticem  
arcanique fides prodiga, (14–16)

lines which exactly fit not only Dio's description (see above, page 229) of Gallus (as F. Ritter recognized in 1856), but also the culprit of our interpretation. Vainglory *tollens vacuum*

## V

The allusion to Cornelius Gallus is so specific that for a contemporary audience it must have been tantamount to naming him. In identifying him as the culprit, however, we have touched only the outer, the almost overt, layer of “significance.” Gallus’ role is to illustrate the deficiencies of popular conceptions of *virtus*. He provides, so to speak, a negative image through which may be reflected the nature of true *virtus*.

To penetrate to that inner core of significance, we must proceed again through all three parts of the ode, first A, then B, then A’, focusing this time on a pervasive presence, that of Caesar Octavian, newly renamed Augustus. Totally invisible on the printed page, Augustus’ image must be assembled, partly dismantled, and reassembled, entirely in the imagination of the reader; but this process takes place under the firm guidance of signals in the text. Needless to say, the various layers of meaning and significance which I can present only in laborious sequence would occur to a contemporary reader almost simultaneously, although even he might need several readings to grasp the whole. This statement does not alter my insistence that the structure of the ode is ABA’.

**Part A.** As we have already observed, the first six stanzas deliberately give the impression that the poem is an encomium. By the end of the military stanzas, various possible exemplars of heroism have assembled at the threshold of the reader’s consciousness, prominent among them Augustus, a Scipio or two, perhaps Regulus, the younger Cato, or

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*verticem* (raising its empty head/ erecting a hollow bronze bust) is surely a biting reference to Gallus’ habit of erecting statues of himself all over Egypt. The ode is addressed to one Varus. Can it be a coincidence that one of Gallus’ oldest friends was named Alfenus Varus?—so devoted a friend that he apparently had no objection to Vergil’s mythologizing Gallus in a poem dedicated to himself (*Ecl.* 6.64–73). The ode can be read as an answer to a complaint by Varus about the severity of his friend’s punishment.

The second text is this couplet of Ovid’s:

tu quoque, si falsum est temerati crimen amici,  
sanguinis atque animae prodige, Galle, tuae, (*Am.* 3.9.63–64)

which presents a different aspect (not a different version) of the scandal; Gallus had committed suicide in 26 B.C. The words *temerati crimen amici* refer to the cause of the disgrace: the charge against him was brought by or on behalf of a friend; this adds another dimension to *fideli*. The word *temerati*, with its connotations of religious pollution, suggests that the reference in III 2 to *Cereris sacrum arcanae* is not merely figurative or topical: the friend was not only betrayed but polluted by the betrayal.

With no more serious intention than to demonstrate that all the details of Horace’s two odes and Ovid’s two couplets *can* be reconciled, even in their most literal sense, as referring to the same scandal, I submit the following hypothesis: A friend of Gallus’ who was an initiate of the cult rashly revealed to him some of its secrets, and Gallus betrayed them at a drunken orgy. Such an act would be a heinous crime against both friendship and religion, one which Augustus could hardly have condoned in a man who was his personal friend and his chief representative in Egypt.

the first Marcellus. The *virtus* stanzas would not necessarily narrow the field if it were not for the fact that, shortly before the ode was composed, a golden shield, afterwards often referred to simply as the *clupeus virtutis*, had been set up in the senate house in honor of Augustus. Its inscription commemorates the emperor's *virtus*, clemency, justice, and piety.<sup>21</sup>

The content of stanza five is consistent with the unequalled prestige and power which Augustus had enjoyed since his military victory at Actium. Furthermore, the heavenward ascent of *virtus* would seem to Horace's audience to allude to the generally accepted belief that Augustus was destined to join his adoptive father among the ranks of the immortals. In the recently published *Georgics*, Vergil had exhorted Octavian to become accustomed to being invoked as a deity even while still on earth (*et votis iam nunc adsuesce vocari*, G. I 42); had promised (metaphorically, to be sure) to dedicate a temple to him (*templum de marmore ponam . . . in medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit*, G. III 13–16); and at the end of the *Georgics* had described Octavian's ascent to Olympus as a present aspiration (*viamque adfectat Olympo*, G. IV 562). It should be kept in mind that these references to a living person as imminently divine were unprecedented in Latin literature. They must have had a dramatic and memorable effect which is too easily overlooked in retrospect.

**Part B.** The anticlimax at line 25 is frustrating and disorienting. The emperor is not named, but neither does he entirely disappear, for the Simonidean original of the *fidele silentium* tag was known to be in Augustus' repertoire of quotations (Plut. *Mor.* 207C). In the lines following the word *vetabo*, the spotlight is abruptly usurped by Gallus, who appears out of thin air as the culprit. Augustus retires to a secondary role as virtuous foil for Gallus' wickedness, for the words *qui Cereris sacrum/volgarit arcanae*, besides describing Gallus' transgression, are a pointed reminder of an instance of Augustus' own exemplary discretion: an initiate of the mysteries himself, he had dismissed his entire retinue from a council at which privileged cult matters were to figure in the discussion (Suet. *Aug.* 93). Finally, the poet's refusal to share a confined space on land or sea with the culprit is an echo and a ringing endorsement of Augustus' repudiation and interdiction of Gallus.<sup>22</sup>

**Part A'.** It remains to consider the role of Augustus in what I have been calling the last section of the poem, A', the second reading of stanzas one to six. As we saw above, when these stanzas are reconsidered with Gallus in mind, *virtus* is revealed as self-deluding ambition, and the

<sup>21</sup> *Mon. Anc.* 34.2, in P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Oxford 1967) 34–37.

<sup>22</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 66.2: *Domo et provinciis suis interdixit.*

struggle to attain *caelum* as a fantasy of transcending the limitations of mortality. How does this altered view of *virtus* and *caelum* apply to Augustus? For the associations formed on the first reading of the ode cannot now simply disappear, but must be reassessed.<sup>23</sup> At Actium and in the four years since, Octavian had risen to dizzying heights of glory, military, political, and personal. If ever any man was subject to the temptations of glory, Octavian/Augustus was at this period of his life.

How had he responded? Stanza five in the ironic reading ends with a dream of power unrestrained by the *arbitrium popularis aerae*. At the beginning of 27 B.C., Octavian was in a position to realize that dream to the full. Instead, he voluntarily relinquished the extraordinary, dictatorial powers he had held for years. In his own words, “. . . at a time when with universal consent I was in complete control of affairs, I transferred the republic from my power to the dominion [his word is *arbitrium*] of the senate and people of Rome.”<sup>24</sup> However cynically one views this offer, however slight its practical effects may have been, the very gesture—after a century in which absolute power alternated with struggles for absolute power—must have been stunningly dramatic. Octavian was, at least in theory, subjecting himself to the checks and restraints of the old republican system, the *arbitrium popularis aerae*.

In the matter of *caelum*, too, the temptations facing Augustus were enormous. It was not only that his feat of bringing peace to a hopelessly strife-torn country seemed an achievement beyond mere human power. He was constantly besieged by the efforts of his grateful subjects—not least energetic among them the poet of the *Georgics*—to confer immediate divinity upon him. The worst that can be said of him is that he was walking a fine line between acceptance and rejection of divine honors. Actually, he was doing rather better than that: he was making calculated distinctions, based on political expediency and local custom, between celebration and worship, between Romans and non-Romans, between himself and his deified adoptive father, and between present godhead on earth and eventual deification. In short, he was being scrupulously careful not to offend against Roman religion and tradition in the matter of his status vis-à-vis the gods.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Whereas “blanks” induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text, “negations” have a complementary function:

The various types of negation invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is canceled, however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude toward what is familiar or determinate—in other words, he is guided to adopt a position in *relation* to the text. (Iser 169)

<sup>24</sup> *Mon. Anc.* 34.1, Brunt and Moore (above, note 21) 34–35.

<sup>25</sup> For a full account of the pro's and con's of Augustus' divine honors, see Taylor (above, note 12) 142–66.

The context, however, seems to require a more specific association, something as specific as the erection of the *clupeus virtutis* and the renunciation of power (not to mention the disgrace of Cornelius Gallus). If we pause to pinpoint these two events chronologically, we see that they are closely related. It was on the thirteenth of January, 27 B.C., that the emperor made his dramatic offer, and it was as a result of this—*quo pro merito meo*—that he was renamed Augustus and given symbolic honors including the *clupeus virtutis*. Cassius Dio puts into Augustus' mouth a speech purportedly delivered when he laid down his extraordinary powers, a speech which in Taylor's opinion deserves serious consideration as an authentic report of the sense of the actual address (Taylor 157). In the course of it the emperor is made to say:

As for immortality we could not possibly achieve it, but by living nobly and dying nobly we do in a sense gain even this boon. Therefore I, who already possess the first requisite and hope to possess the second, return to you the armies and the provinces, the revenues and the laws.<sup>26</sup> (53.9.5)

The first clause is a firm denial of the possibility of immortality; the second seems to me to express no more than a rhetorical softening of that denial. The whole sentence suits our interpretation admirably. If we cannot be sure of the accuracy of Dio's report, we can at least say that his version of Augustus' speech and our version of Horace's ode reinforce each other. On the thirteenth of January, 27 B.C., Augustus declared himself to be bounded by mortality, and indicated his acceptance of the bonds of *fides* with other mortals by returning to them the powers he had held over them.

Nothing in Horace's words even remotely suggests the other major event in this cluster of circumstances, the bestowal by the senate and the acceptance by Octavian of the new name Augustus; but the contemporary audience could not fail to be reminded of this too, as the poet well knew. Many of them must have seen in the name, with its links to Romulus the king and its connotation of more-than-human status, at least a hint of compromise with monarchy and divinity.<sup>27</sup> Here we are at the far edge of associative significance. Horace gives the reader no guidance, and the mode of reception must be highly individual. The event must be mentioned, however, because the association is inevitable, and it leaves the question of Augustus' stance more open than do the specifically evoked renunciations of power and of divinity.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted by Taylor 157, in Cary's translation. This passage has been curiously overlooked (or dismissed?) by historians other than Taylor. I have found no other reference to Augustus' repudiation of immortality.

<sup>27</sup> See Taylor 158–60 on the connotations and implications of the name Augustus.

In sum, what the poet does in stanzas one to six is to draw an implied analogy between Gallus and Augustus, in a way that emphasizes the differences between them but leaves some room for continued skepticism. The emperor himself would undoubtedly interpret the intent as praise, perhaps not unmixed with admonition, much in the spirit of those signs ubiquitous in the early 1980s: "Thank you for not smoking."

This ode, which at its beginning promised to be an encomium of Augustus and then frustrated that expectation, turns out in the end to be just that. It is however a far cry from the fawning flattery suspicion of which has so distressed many of Horace's admirers. In this one instance at least, the praise is indirect and contingent upon future conduct. The ode calls into question the very nature of the *virtus* for which Augustus had recently been honored (by the erection of the *clupeus virtutis*), and in the final analysis commends the emperor not for his glory but for resisting the seductions of glory. The ode achieves its end—in a total of 137 words—by a route which draws the reader into the tensions and conflicting values of an extraordinary moment in history.

To quote Iser once more (74):

... the literary recodification of social and historical norms has a double function: it enables the participants—or contemporary readers—to see what they cannot normally see in the ordinary process of day-to-day living; and it enables the observers—the subsequent generations of readers—to grasp a reality that was never their own.

#### APPENDIX: THE DIVINITY OF AUGUSTUS IN THE ROMAN CYCLE

This reinterpretation of *Odes* III 2 raises a number of questions, especially about Horace's attitude toward the divinity of Augustus in other odes of the "Roman cycle."<sup>28</sup> There are some apparent inconsistencies (which in fact exist even without the complications of our new reading); but we have already seen that Horace uses such anomalies as signals that there is more to the text than meets the eye.

***Odes* III 1 and III 6.** The first of the Roman odes (III 1) immediately after its brief proem defines the respective realms of god(s), rulers and subjects:

<sup>28</sup> Considerations of space forbid me to do more than mention existing treatments of the Roman cycle. See L. Amundsen, "Die Römeroden des Horaz" in *Wege zu Horaz* (ed. H. Oppermann, Darmstadt 1972) 111-38; S. Commager (above, note 13) *passim*; G. Duckworth, "*Animae Dimidium Meae*," *TAPA* 87 (1956) 281-316; E. Fraenkel (above, note 1) 269-88; R. Heinze, "Der Zyklus der Römeroden" in *Vom Geist des Altertums* (Darmstadt 1960) 190-204; F. Klingner, *Varia Variorum für K. Reinhardt* (Muenster/Köln 1952) 118-36; G. Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford 1969) 26-67.

regum timendorum in proprios greges,  
reges in ipsos imperiumst Iovis. (5–6)

In exactly the same position, the last ode of the cycle (III 6) expresses the same distinction even more forcefully:

dis te minorem quod geris imperas:  
hinc omne principium, huc refer exitum. (5–6)

The adverbs *hinc* and *huc* refer not (or not only) to *dis* as is sometimes said, but to the entire statement: the primacy of the gods is to be the guiding principle of rulers, from beginning to end. This ode is ostensibly addressed to the Romans as rulers of the world, but the rhetorical use of the singular (*Romane*, 2) makes it particularly applicable to the one Roman of whom this form of the verb—*imperas*—could be used in a literal sense. III 6.5 could stand as a summing up of our analysis of III 2.

On the other hand, *Odes* III 3 and III 5 contain passages which seem to violate this clearly-drawn boundary between earthly rulers and gods. One assumption that the reader is surely entitled to make is that a poet's thought-system will be consistent, at least within the limits of a single work or a group of closely-related works like the Roman cycle. In fairness to the text, the reader ought not to gloss over or explain away apparent inconsistencies, but seek to find possible meanings alternative to the obvious one that produces the inconsistency. Our task is made easier by the fact (which I think no one will dispute) that the passages cited above from III 1 and III 6 are undeniably straightforward and non-ironic. It is III 3 and III 5 that must be reconciled to them. While I cannot aspire to a full analysis of these two odes in this context, I shall try to show how such a reconciliation can be effected.

***Odes* III 3.** In stanza three of *Odes* III 3, Augustus is shown in the starry citadels, reclining between the demigods Pollux and Hercules, in the company also of Bacchus and Romulus. The scene is clearly posthumous. Can it be reconciled with the poet's insistence—in the passages we have been citing—upon the boundary between rulers and gods? The answer requires some fine distinctions: as long as they are on earth, rulers (like all mortals) must recognize their subordination to the gods and must not even aspire to immortality. It is the arrogance of such aspirations that concerns the poet. Whatever Augustus actually said in his repudiation of immortality, his remarks are evoked in III 2, stanza six, solely for the purpose that suits the context: as evidence that Augustus does not equate himself with the gods.

In 27 B.C. the posthumous deification of Augustus was already inevitable, and that is what Horace is predicting—possibly with some feeling of reluctant resignation—in III 3, stanza three. There was acceptable

Roman precedent for it in the apotheosis of Romulus, and the apotheosized Greek demigods too had long been assimilated into Roman tradition.<sup>29</sup> What is important to notice is the absence from the starry band of such more obvious antecedents (and potential models) as Alexander and his successors, the Hellenistic divine kings—and of course the deified Julius—all of whom had entertained pretensions to divinity on earth. It is worth recalling that Rome had narrowly escaped becoming a divine monarchy under Antony and Cleopatra.

Horace seems to be accomplishing here some subtle propaganda of his own, directed (as I suspect most of his propaganda is) not so much at the Roman people on behalf of Augustus as at the emperor himself—*lene consilium*, he would probably call it. This instance, I must admit, does represent some compromise with the poet's insistence throughout the *Odes* upon the inevitability, the universality, and the finality of death. It is a realistic compromise, and it does not undercut but promotes a fundamental premise of the cycle: that rulers on earth are only rulers, not gods.<sup>30</sup>

As we have said, III 2 implies that the virtuous ruler does not aspire even to posthumous immortality. If there is any discrepancy between III 3 and our reading of III 2, it is located in the phrase *hac arte . . . enisus*, which as usually interpreted suggests that heaven is to be attained by unremittent striving, after the manner of the famous "steadfast man" of stanzas one and two, an idea that had in fact been popularized by the Stoics, and especially by Cicero (see above, note 12, and also note 29). To resolve this discrepancy, I am compelled to attack that sacrosanct figure and declare him to be a red herring of the same species as the unexamined *virtus* of III 2. At line 8 he is left standing unperturbed amid the ruins of the heavens, having defied the thunderbolts of Jupiter in line 6.<sup>31</sup> It should not require unusual astuteness on the

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Cicero's version of an ancient law, *de leg.* II 8.19, *divos . . . colunto et ollos, quos endo caelo merita locaverint, Herculem, Liberum, Aesculapium, Castorem, Pollicem, Quirinum. . .*, though Horace seems to take issue with *quos merita locaverint* (see further comments in my text, below).

<sup>30</sup> That Horace himself felt some discomfort at this compromise is suggested by *Odes* IV 8, in which for the first time he clearly formulates the idea (derived from Pindar) that the only immortality is that conferred by poetry. This ode contains so many close echoes of III 2 and III 3 that it seems almost a gloss on those odes. In IV 8.22–34, Romulus, Hercules, the Tyndaridae, and Bacchus—Augustus' heavenly companions of III 3—are specifically mentioned as recipients of the boon of immortality conferred by song, a boon shared with mortal beneficiaries named earlier in the ode. Note especially the role of *sic* (= *hac arte*) in line 28: *caelo Musa beat. sic Iovis interest / optatis epulis impiger Hercules*—and the others.

<sup>31</sup> *Fulminantis magna manus Iovis* cannot mean merely that the *vir iustus* is not afraid of lightning. Horace uses the root *fulmin-* sparingly, seven times in his entire *oeuvre*, all of them in the *Odes*. It always denotes a portent of Jupiter's displeasure, admonitory or

reader's part to fill the Iserian gap between these two lines with a cause-and-effect relationship. This steadfast man is a caricature of the Stoic sage, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the single-minded self-righteousness of a Cato.

What, then, of *hac arte . . . enisus*? If we are right about stanzas one and two, *hac arte* can hardly refer to the steadfast man's intractability, nor can it depend upon *enisus*. *Hac arte* must be taken with *attigit* (*enisus* then is unmodified) and must point, not back to one and two, but forward, aided by the repetition of *hac* (like a series of arrows—"This way, not that") in 13 and 15, to the long speech of Juno beginning in line 18. "When their struggles were ended, they attained the fiery citadels in the way that I am about to relate." According to Juno's account (I confine my comments to that part of it which is relevant to our problem), Romulus was admitted to heaven because of a decision of her own; if she had decided otherwise, he would not be there. There is no suggestion that his merits or his striving were a factor in her decision. Immortality is granted at the (possibly arbitrary) discretion of the gods.

**Odes III 5.** This ode presents a problem more serious than the posthumous presence of Augustus in heaven in III 3, because here we are dealing not with posthumous cult but with a *praesens divus*. It is not enough for us to say with (among others) Commager (176; see above, note 13) that this ode "carefully relegates his role as a *praesens divus* to the future." If Horace is accepting the idea of Augustus' divinity at any time before his death, we are faced with a conflict between this ode and our analysis of III 2, not to mention III 1 and III 6.

Let us start with two observations about stanza one. It consists of a distinction between Jupiter and Augustus which seems at first glance parallel to III 1.5-6: Jupiter in heaven, Augustus on earth.<sup>32</sup> One word, however, subverts the parallel: Augustus is described as *divus*. The second point is that the lines devoted to Augustus amount to a future real condition of the the pattern "If (*or when*) X happens, the result will be

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punitive. The *fulmina Iovis* are, in Horace's metaphorical system, a fixed symbol, no more susceptible of a casual change of meaning than the cross of Christianity. (On the other hand, we may suppose that the meaning was not so fixed in ordinary usage. It seems clear that the passage is to be taken at face value on the first reading.)

Note that the *vir iustus* shares *virtus*' disdain for republican principles: compare *civium ardor prava iubentium* (2) with *arbitrio popularis aerae* (2.20).

<sup>32</sup> There is an even closer parallel in I 12.51-68, in which power over the universe is apportioned between Jupiter in heaven and Caesar on earth. I relegate it to the footnotes because it is generally dated later than III 5. Stanza one of III 5 seems so clearly a subverted "quotation" of that passage that I would urge a reconsideration of the date of I 12. (It is usually assigned to 25 B.C., when Marcellus—mentioned in line 46—joined the Julian gens by marrying Julia. The words *crescit occulto aevo* in any case seem more appropriate to a boy in his early teens, who has not yet come before the public eye. Marcellus was born about 42 B.C.)

Y." Such a condition may be interpreted (leaving aside the option of simple factual prediction) as either a promise or a warning. These lines have always (as far as I have been able to discover) been taken as a promise; the deification of Augustus on earth is a *desiderandum* attainable on condition that he first conquer the world. According to that interpretation, Horace is urging a policy of aggressive imperialism in order that Augustus may acquire divine status. Since the inconsistency that concerns us resides precisely there, it will be worthwhile to hold in mental suspension the alternative possibility, that the condition constitutes a warning.

There is no way of deciding on the basis of stanza one alone how the implied condition is to be understood. As in the case of III 2, the ode must be read in a somewhat circular—here even spiral—manner. If we call stanza one A, stanzas two and three B, and the rest of the ode C, we can describe the structure (at least so long as our object is confined to resolving the problem of A) as ABC(AB)'A". That is to say, AB (stanzas one to three) can be fully understood only when they are reread in the light of the rest of the poem; and even on this rereading, stanza one (A') remains unresolved until after the second reading of two and three.

There is a wide gap between stanzas one and two which according to our Iserian principles demands filling, sooner or later, by the reader. Stanzas two and three are an indignant protest against the assimilation to Parthian life of the Roman prisoners taken after Crassus' defeat at Carrhae in the year 53. The exact target of the indignation—is it the Parthians, the inert Roman senate, or the prisoners themselves?—can be determined only in the light of Regulus' speech in stanzas five through ten, the gist of which is that Romans who have dishonored the bonds of patriotism—and especially soldiers who have chosen submission rather than death—have forfeited their claim on the *fides* of their countrymen.

The nature of the captives' breach of *fides* can be defined more precisely: both sets of prisoners, those of the Carthaginians and those of the Parthians, have transgressed the boundary that distinguishes Romans from non-Romans; they have sacrificed their Roman identity in exchange for their lives. They have become in the one case Carthaginians and in the other Parthians. *Pro inversi mores!* This phrase is the key to the filling of the gap between stanzas one and two. The reader is left to make the actual connection for himself: the price of world conquest is loss of national identity.

To return to stanza one and *praesens divus*: let us focus for a moment on the two main verbs. The *credidimus* clause, with its significant subject and tense, encompasses all of Roman tradition, the linchpin of which is the supremacy of Jupiter. *Habebitur* projects us into a impersonal, anonymous future. It will no longer be "we Romans" who believe; and the belief itself will strike at the very heart of Roman tradition. If the *graves Persae*, who

(or so it was thought) believe that their ruler is Jupiter incarnate, are annexed to Rome, Augustus will be believed to be a god. *Pro inversi mores!* Romans will be no longer Romans, but Persians.

This reading would assume too much boldness on Horace's part unless we suppose—and there is ample evidence for the supposition—that Augustus himself (at least in Horace's opinion) sincerely wished to check such orientalizing of Roman belief. The note of anti-imperialism would be daring indeed if it went against an Augustan policy of world aggrandizement. In fact this was the period of the *pax Augusta*; the temple of Janus had been closed for two years—one of the emperor's most cherished achievements. The problem of the losses at Carrhae was eventually settled by peaceful negotiation. There was no attempt at any time to conquer either Parthia or Britain.

What we may deduce from *adiectis Persis* is that there was public clamor for the conquest of Parthia in vengeance for the defeat at Carrhae, and that Horace was supporting Augustus' preference for a negotiated settlement. This does not imply that Horace was a mouth-piece for Augustus. It is more likely that we see here the same mixture of support and admonition that we found in III 2 (see page 235 above): "Thank you for not trying to conquer the world. Thank you for not wanting to be a god."

These necessarily condensed and narrowly focussed observations on the Roman cycle, in combination with our detailed analysis of III 2, confirm, I believe, the proposition stated on page 221 above, that Horace in these odes employs more innovative techniques than has ever been suspected—at least in recorded criticism—and that these techniques demand special modes of reading. Not without good reason did the poet in the proem to the series exclude from his audience the *profanum volgus*, those uninitiated into the mysteries of the Muses; and not without good reason did he describe these odes as *carmina non prius audita*.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> I wish to express my thanks to Gregson Davis and Mary Pratt, whose Stanford seminars, on Horace's *Odes* and literary theory respectively, provided much-needed inspiration to an auditor long absent from formal academic pursuits; to Mark Edwards, whose comments and queries wrought vast improvement especially in section III; to TAPA's referees, both of whom suggested the appendix; and especially to my husband, who made me realize at each successive stage of this undertaking that I had not yet got to the heart of the matter.