A NOTE ON THE UNITY OF HORACE, CARM. II, 3

In a recent article A. J. Woodman questioned the organic unity of Horace's Ode to Dellius.1 The poem, according to him, is unsuccessful: Horace has failed to control the literary allusions and topoi in the poem and therefore to organize the thought into a consistent whole. Especially the two middle stanzas (lines 13–20) are irrelevant as the prosperous Dellius is not in need of carpe diem advice.2 Perhaps it is as well at this stage to return to the simple 'logic' of the poem's imagery. In this note we shall be concerned only with an organizing element in the poem that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has not been explicitly formulated.

The theme of Carm. II, 3, namely, mortality, is set already in moriture Delli (4), and sustained in several other words and images: nimium breues fiores amoenae ... rosaed (13f.),3 sororum filia trium ... atra (15f.),4 victima nil miserantis Orci (24),5 urna (26) and aeternum exilium (27f.). This theme becomes more explicit from line 17 with the insistent anaphora cedes ... .

A complementary theme develops simultaneously: carpe diem,7 clothed

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2. What N. E. Collinge, The Structure of Horace's Odes, London 1961, 138f., interprets in the testimonia on Dellius as opportunistic vacillation, G. Williams, Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry, Oxford 1968, 112f., interprets as political shrewdness. It is methodologically unsound to argue from these testimonia, themselves open to different interpretations, back into the poem, and to find fault with the unity of the poem according as its data correspond or are inconsistent with the details of the external evidence on Dellius. The poem must be interpreted on its own first, and any external evidence used as aid to understanding, not as criterion for judgement. Collinge, 137f., has some salutary remarks, and Williams, 133, is correct in reminding us that Horace is above all moulding literary material (though his qualifying 'simply' is unfortunate).
5. Woodman's view (p. 179) that victima and cogimur do not constitute a metaphor from flock-herding, but one to be understood more in the context of public life, deserves consideration but qualification. Horace is presenting two worlds: pastoral (lines 6–12) and urban (17–20), with lines 13–16 possible in either; both worlds merge in lines 21–24; victima therefore refers to both worlds, pastoral and civic, as neither is safe from death. The phrase sub diuo moreris may, as L. P. Wilkinson has suggested (Horace and his Lyric Poetry, Cambridge 1968, 37 n. 1), refer to the custom of allowing sacrificial victims to graze, in which case the phrase would have been generated by the victima-metaphor; but in its context it refers primarily to the pastoral world of simple, even impoverished way of life. Cogimur more certainly continues the metaphor, referring to both pastoral and urban worlds.
6. Collinge, 95, and Woodman, 165f., have discussed the ebb and flow of ideas in the poem.
7. Collinge, 72, and Woodman, 167–9, have suggested that res ardurae are not expanded in the rest of the poem because they are not applicable to Dellius: enjoyment and happiness are dwelt on.
mainly in pastoral terms: 8 in remota gramine per dies/ festos reclinatum (6f.), interiore nota Falerni (8), 9 pinus ingens albaque populus/ umbram hospital em consociare amam/ ramis (9–11), 10 uina et unguenta et . . . flores (13f.), saltibus et domo/ uillaque (17f.), and diuittis (20).

This theme of carpe diem is conditioned, as often in Horace, by a third, moderatio and the need to preserve equilibrium: aequam . . . mentem (1f.), temperatam (3). This theme is not explicitly developed in the rest of the poem, yet its aptness for the vacillating Delli us could not have escaped a contemporary reader’s attention here at the beginning of the poem. 11

Furthermore, the entire poem is dominated by the idea of time: omni tempore (5), per dies (6), aetas (15), moreris (23), serius oicius (26), and aeternum (27). There is some order and progression in these time phrases and words: omni tempore, forming a kind of ring-composition with aeternum, becomes ironical in juxtaposition with aeternum: the omne tempus of life is hardly the aeternitas of death. The other terms are arranged in a sequence in alternate stanzas: dies, aetas, moreris (the span of life as a lingering sojourn, a mora mortis), 12 with serius oicius introducing an unsettling effect on the progression and collapsing the sequence in preparation for the aeternum exilium of death. At the same time the tenses in each stanza establish a structural pattern:

stanzas 1: future (memento, 1; moriture, 4)
stanzas 2: future (uixeris, 5; bearis, 7)
stanzas 3: present (amant, 10; laborat, 11)
stanzas 4: present (iube, 14; patiuntur, 16)
stanzas 5: future (cedes 17 & 19; potietur, 20)
stanzas 6: present (interest, 22; though moreris, 23)
stanzas 7: present (cogimur, 25; uersatur, 26)

and future (exitura, 27; impositura, 28).

If nothing else, there is at least a definite ring-composition with the future participles. 13

The idea of time, moreover, is embodied, as elsewhere in Horace’s work, 14

9. Wine and carpe diem are associated also in Odes I, 9, 7f.; II, 7, 19–22; III, 12, 1f.; 14, 17–20; 29, 1–5.
11. The three themes are noted by Collinge, ‘Form and Content in Horatian Lyric’, CPh 50, 1955, 164, and Woodman, 166–71. The latter’s view that the carpe diem theme is the kernel of the poem and therefore paradoxical as Delli us requires no such advice, ignores the force of moriture and the last three stanzas. Whatever other qualities Delli us has, he is above all mortal. Cf. Witke, 250. Horace insists (cedes . . . cedes, and the imperatives) that Delli us’s enjoyment of possessions is subject to change.
13. Witke, 251, has also emphasised the importance of the element of time in the poem.
in a river-image which becomes the central controlling and unifying element in
the poem. The image enters in *lympha fugax* (12), continues in *Tiberis* (18),
and culminates in the river Styx implied in the last line in *cumba*.

This image is introduced and recalled at regular intervals (stanzas 3, 5 and 7) as if to keep
it in the reader's mind. But it also develops. The *lympha fugax* occurs in
the context of idyllic surroundings, a *locus amoenus* rather than a specific place
where poet and addressee are ensconced. Overtones of fleetingness and even
of toil may have been intended by Horace in *obliquo laborat...trepidare rivo*.

In *Tiberis* a "note of danger" becomes more explicit. The apparently
harmless stream (*lympha*) has become the potentially dangerous Tiber of
*Carmin*, I, 2 and III, 29, 33ff. The climax of the poem presents the reader with an
implied and therefore more ominous, but no less certain river, the Styx, river
of death.

The enjoyable, clear little stream in a pastoral setting, and the yellow Tiber
in a fashionable urban setting are transformed in the course of the poem into
the inevitable, dark river of death. Pastoral stream and urban river are really
only other manifestations of the Styx. The idyllic world gives way to the more
sophisticated world: the secluded (and *remoto* is ironical in that it is not remote
enough for death) *locus amoenus* in the country is replaced by the wealthy
pastures and estates and villas along the Tiber, a world inhabited by heirs
hovering around the rich (19f.). All is subject to change and death: rich and
poor, noble and humble, *urbanus* and *rusticus* are all victims of Orcus. In
both the idyllic and urban worlds transience is ever-present: death penetrates
both types of existence as the greater reality.

The theme was not new; few poetic themes are. But the re-creation of the
theme into an organic whole that means far more than its component parts,
a re-creation that in fact makes the theme new and different--this is Horace's
achievement. Not least important in this organic expression is the *lympha-
Tiberis-cumba* thought-chain.

Rand Afrikaans University

Johannesburg

W. J. HENDERSON

15. Vergil, for example, has *Stygia...cumba* (GTIV, 506).
16. F. Plessis, for example, imagines Horace being transported in thought to Dellius's
gardens from line 12 (*Oeuvres d'Horace: Odes, Épodes et Chant Séculaire*, Paris 1924,
Hildesheim 1966). Whatever details were of particular relevance for Dellius have been trans-
formed in the poem into universal application: *moriturus at the beginning and omnes cogimur
at the end ensure this.
London 1962, 284; Witke, 251.
19. The poetic word *lympha*, used of clear river or spring water (cf. Lewis & Short),
contributes to the idyllic picture, and provides a strong contrast with *flaus Tiberis*; cf.
suggested that *flaus* adds a note of familiarity.

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