

DULCE ET DECORUM EST, ACTIUM, AND
THE *CLUPEUS VIRTUTIS*

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THE CENTENNIALS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR and of the publication of Wilfred Owen's *Poems* in 1920 make this an interesting moment to reconsider Horace's second Roman *Ode*, *Carm.* 3.2, and its famous line, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, "it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." The Great War forever transformed reception of that *sententia*. Sydney Oswald's 1915 poem on Gallipoli ("They gave their lives for England . . .") understands it to represent the bond between the nation and the soldier's code of honor; thus in 1916 it was engraved upon the west façade of the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.¹ Bertolt Brecht, on the other hand, is said to have reacted against the carnage of the war in a 1915 essay by accusing Horace of writing "shabby propaganda on demand" for Augustus and of being "the emperor's chubby jester," who at Philippi ran when it was his turn to fight.² In 1917, when Wilfred Owen was writing "Dulce et Decorum Est" while recuperating for a year from PTSD before returning to the front, he famously called it "the old lie" (1920: stanza 4, line 27). E. Vandiver (2013: 130) argues, however, that it was not so much Horace's poem or the phrase that was a lie for Owen as its misuse by war recruiters like Jessie Pope to prey upon the patriotism of the young.

Ezra Pound proposed that *dulce et decorum est* does not belong beside *pro patria mori* ("died some *pro patria, non dulce non et decor*"),³ i.e., that war has nothing to do with glory, and that the nostalgic reception of Horace may even be implicated in the terrible suffering of the First World War. Evidence from other Horatian *Odes*, from similar language in the *Aeneid*, and from a structural analysis of *Carm.* 3.2, suggests that Horace regards the phrase not as standing for the bond between soldier and country—though he is not questioning the praise of patriotic sacrifice—but for a Greek heroic ideal from the past that is causing problems in the Rome of his day. During the First and Second Triumvirates, romantic notions of patriotism became associated with the fight to bring back

In memory of Roger Hornsby (University of Iowa), the best teacher and friend, and with thanks to David Wilson-Okamura and Frank Romer for writing on behalf of an early version of this paper for a grant application. Translations are my own.

¹Vandiver 2013: 394–395. A high-resolution rendering can be seen at <https://www.loc.gov/item/hec2008007628/>.

²The contents of Brecht's essay are known from the recollections of a classmate. See Hommel 1968: 220–221, following Müllereisert reprinted in Witt 1964: 18.

³"Hugh Selwyn Mauberly (Part I. Life and Contacts). Ode pour l'élection de son sépulchre" IV, stanza 2, line 10 (1920).

the old republic under senatorial rule. After Caesar's assassination and three existential wars had left the empire in ruins, the "restoration of the republic" had to be redefined. Patriotic love of country could not continue to mean civil war without end (cf. Hor. *Ep.* 7). The battle of Actium and the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra are portrayed by the poets as exemplifying the consequences of being ruled by passions and sentiment, or as Vergil put it, "mixing marriage with grief" (*luctu miscere hymenaeos*, *Aen.* 12.805). In this context, Horace's reference to "sweetness" mixed with "death" takes on a different meaning.

I. LITERARY AND HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE THEME
OF PATRIOTIC DEATH

The idea that dying for one's country is sweet goes back to Bacchylides, Tyrtaeus, and even Homer, but its most memorable expression is Simonides' ode on Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae (fr. 531 PMG):⁴

τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων
εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἂ τύχα, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότμος,
βωμὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνᾶστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος·
ἐντάφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον εὐρῶς
5 οὔθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρώσει χρόνος·
ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ὄδε σηκὸς οἰκέταν εὐδοξίαν
Ἑλλάδος εἴλετο· μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ Λεωνίδας,
Σπάρτας βασιλεύς, ἀρετᾶς μέγαν λειοπῶς
κόσμον ἀένανόν τε κλέος.

For those who died at Thermopylae, their fortune is glorious and their fate is noble; an altar is their tomb, in place of lamentation is remembrance, and tears are their praise. Such funeral honors neither decay nor time that conquers all will erase. This sepulcher of noble men chose the glory of Greece to be its eternal attendant. Leonidas, King of Sparta, bears witness: he has left a great emblem of bravery and an eternal wellspring of fame.

Simonides associates sacrifice for one's country with fortune, nobility, remembrance, praise, immortality, fame, "virtue," and "glory" (ἀρετᾶς . . . κλέος). It is usually assumed that the "sweetness" of which Horace speaks derives from this glory. W. Oates (1932: 1) argues that two lines of the poem directly reference Simonides: "death pursues even the man who flees" (*mors et fugacem persequitur virum*, 3.2.14) translates Simonides fr. 534, ὁ δ' αὖ θάνατος κίχκε καὶ τὸν

⁴Winkler (2000: 180) compares Tyrtaeus fr. 10 West² (τεθνάμεναι γὰρ καλὸν ἐνὶ προμάχοισι πεσόντα / ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν περὶ ἧ πατρίδι μαρνάμενον, "it is a noble and perfect death when a good man falls on the front lines, fighting for his native land"); Nisbet and Rudd (2004: 27) adduce Bacchyl. 3.47, θανεῖν γλυκίστον. Lindo (1971) makes a case for the wider influence of Tyrtaeus and Greek conceptions of honor upon this ode. Nisbet (1988: 16–17) and Hommel (1968: 224) compare how for Odysseus nothing is "sweeter" than one's native land (γλυκερώτερον . . . γλυκίον, *Od.* 9.28, 34).

φυγόμαχον; and “there is a sure reward for faithful silence” (*est et fidei tuta silentio / merces*, 3.2.25–26) translates Simonides fr. 582, ἔστυ καὶ σιγᾶς ἀκίνδυνον γέρας (Plut. *Reg. et imp. apophth.* 207c–d), a favorite saying of Augustus.⁵ Behind Horace’s mention of not allowing the profaner of mysteries “under his roof” or “to sail with him” (*sub trabibus fragilemque mecum / solvat phaselon*, 3.2.28–29), Oates also sees allusions to two famous anecdotes from the life of Simonides (fr. 510, epigrams 84–85 Page = *Anth. Pal.* 7.516, 7.77).⁶

Horace’s use of Simonides may be purposeful, since the battle of Thermopylae was a confrontation between East and West, Persia and Greece, and the principal battles of the Persian War, like the three East-West battles that determined the Roman civil war (Pharsalus, Philippi, and Actium), took place on Greek soil.⁷ In Vergil’s *Aeneid* there is a pervasive theme of East-West conflict: the defeat of Troy (East) at the hands of the Greeks (West), is later reversed when the (Eastern) Greek and Trojan Teucrians defeat the (Western) Latins and Rutulians, whose *mores* and name nevertheless are adopted (12.823–840). In this context, it is counter-intuitive to suppose that Horace is advocating Simonides’ Greek ideal of manly excellence and glory, when the second half of *Carm.* 3.2 idealizes a more typically Roman statesman who exudes *gravitas* and *pietas*.

A parallel *sententia* in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, moreover, is used to portray the irrationality of fighting to save the old republic.⁸ As Aeneas is mounting a futile defense of Troy (2.314–317), he says:

315 *arma amens capio; nec sat rationis in armis,*
 sed glomerare manum bello et concurrere in arcem
 cum sociis ardent animi; furor iraque mentem
 praecipitat, pulchrumque mori succurrit in armis.

Senseless, I take up arms, though there is no sense in arms: my spirits burn to gather a force for battle and hurry to the acropolis with my compatriots. But fury and anger overthrow my mind, and it occurs to me that it would be beautiful to die in arms.

Aeneas is portrayed as a true believer in the cause of saving Troy. As symbols of the old republic, Troy’s fall and Aeneas’ attempt to save it exemplify Vergil’s analysis of the Roman experience in the civil war battles of Pharsalus and Philippi. As Aeneas rushes into battle against the Greeks, there is another battle taking place in his soul, where *ira* and *furor* are fighting against *mens*.⁹

⁵West 2002: 28.

⁶Oates 1932: 2–15; see also Harrison 2001: 261; Williams 1969: 36–37.

⁷There is a lost poem on the Battle of Salamis by Simonides (fr. 536), which Harrison (2001: 266) argues might have been received as an analog of the Battle of Actium. On the East-West motif in literature about Actium, see, for example, on the *Aeneid*, Cairns 1989: 125–126 and Bowie 1990: 479–480.

⁸Quinn 1980: 245 and 1968: 20–21; see also Cairns 1989: 82–83.

⁹On the Stoic doctrine of pathos, see Plut. *Mor.* 441c, 446f–447a (*SVF* 3.459).

His “spirits burn” to fight and “take up” arms, but another fire within—fury’s torch—has already taken over his reason. It is impossible for Aeneas to provide leadership when his soul is divided against itself, with reason ruled by the passions. The historical allegory implies that it is impossible for a senate at war with itself to save a republic already consumed by political faction. The final expression of the interior conflict that clouds Aeneas’ mind with false appearances is the oxymoronic thought that it would be “beautiful to die” (*pulchrumque mori*) in arms. Vergil suggests that, although Aeneas’ patriotic impulse may seem noble in this moment, behind the superficial impression there are internal contradictions caused by irrational passion both in the soul of Aeneas and in Troy that drive them towards destruction. As Panthus tells Aeneas, they are no longer Trojans, *Ilium* is no more, there is no *patria* for which to fight, and no glory (*fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium et ingens / gloria Teucrorum*, 2.325–326). By analogy, the patriot at Pharsalus or Philippi loves a Rome that no longer exists. The beauty of patriotic death is more a figment than the ghost who warns against it. The illusion of a non-existent past is just a siren calling Rome to its death.

Horace begins the “Roman Odes” with a diagnosis of the passions that destroyed the old republic: the appetite for estates, politics, fame, or social standing, i.e., excessive desire (*Carm.* 3.1.9–12, 25).¹⁰ In *Carm.* 3.3, he details the sins of Troy in ways that apply clearly to the republic: corrupt leadership, adultery, and impious greed (*duce fraudulentō . . . Lacaenae splendet adulterae . . . omne sacrum rapiente dextra*, 24–25, 52). Though it is a city of Trojan exiles, Rome may rule the world, provided there is a “wide gulf” between the old Troy and the new Rome (*dum longus inter saeviat Ilion / Romamque pontus*, 3.37–38). For him to have suggested in 3.2 that fighting to save the *patria* is “sweet and fitting” would be incongruous, or at least raise the question of which *patria* he means, since he seems to say that the old one could not and should not have been saved as it was.¹¹

In *Carm.* 3.4.37–80, Horace portrays Caesar as resting after a Gigantomachic struggle that suggests Actium. He clearly fights for the *patria* but does not die; and the suggestion that Pompey after Pharsalus or Antony after Actium or any of the dead enemies of Caesar and Octavian should be considered ideals of patriotic behavior is a fraught notion at best. Even if we propose that the line

¹⁰Mader 1987: 15.

¹¹It would be anachronistic to object against Horace that the sins of the republic seem to pale beside those of the principate in the long view of history. Vergil and Horace seem to argue that the solution to the wars and passions of the past is the leadership of Augustus. This view is not really diminished by the “Two Voices” theory of Augustan poetry, which posits Vergilian ambivalence about the emperor’s new order. As Tarrant (1997: 184–185) suggests, it was possible for Augustan writers to critique the “corrupt state of contemporary morality” (*Liv. Praef.* 9; *Hor. Carm.* 3.6.45–48) as perhaps the cause and the price of so many civil wars, and yet to envision that a Roman would receive these texts as being consistent with hope for the future under Augustus.

resounds of Brutus,¹² Horace would be creating the appearance that the murder of Caesar and the battle of Philippi were patriotic acts, which was certainly not the view of Augustus.¹³ He could of course be addressing the problem of cowardice among pro-Augustan forces past or present, but that would be an absurd problem to discuss in imperial propaganda. The poetic features of the line also undercut any sense of glory: the sweetness of *dulce* is shortened by elision, and, as if to portray the indecorous reality of death, “being” is cut short by prodelision (*decorumst*).¹⁴ Lohmann (1989: 339) points out that the line even contradicts Horace’s own actions, since he chose not to die for his country at Philippi, but to flee like a coward and live.¹⁵

In *Carm.* 2.7, Horace recalls the fight for the old republic under Brutus, and how his feeling of patriotism was revealed as delusion at Philippi. The retreat was swift and the shields were abandoned on that day when the courage of men failed (*relicta non bene parmula, cum fracta virtus*, 10–11); now it is a difficult memory that demands a bottle of “old oblivion” (*oblivioso Massico*, 21). Horace guides our interpretation of that moment by his use of *deducte* (*deducte Bruto militiae duce*, 2). There is etymological wordplay in *deducte . . . duce*, which suggests the oxymoron “with and without a leader,” and alludes not only to Brutus’ failures as a commander, but also to the condition of the late republic.¹⁶

Horace is directing us to the special significance of *deductum* in Augustan poetry. Vergil uses it to reveal his approach to Hellenistic poetics in *Ecl.* 6.4–5, when he alters the Callimachan command of Apollo to “feed the sacrificial victim (θύοζ) fat, but keep your Muse slender (λεπταλέην).” Vergil’s Apollo commands Tityrus, “feed your sheep (*ovis*) fat, but sing a slender (*deductum*) song.”¹⁷ In *Ecl.* 6, *deductum* signals a kind of double *recusatio*, that Vergil will not write epic, but also that he will not follow the attendant Callimachan injunction against singing of kings and heroes (*Aet.* fr. 1.3–5). Themes of politics, leadership, and war will intrude into the world of the *Eclogues*. The change from “victim” to “sheep” suggests that Vergil’s flock, like the stone cows of Myron before the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, will not be killed as sacrifices.¹⁸ Vergil’s

¹² See Plut. *Brut.* 29.5, 29.6, 40.5.

¹³ In *Res Gestae* 1, Augustus says he “liberated the republic from its oppression under the tyranny of faction” (*rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi*).

¹⁴ The traditional response, that such ornaments only heighten the beauty of a line, are less persuasive because they do not account for the organic symbolism of the poetic elements, which Horace shows, for example, below (66) in his use of zeugma on *suspiret* (9).

¹⁵ Dinkel 2003: 391; cf. *Carm.* 2.7.10.

¹⁶ See Moles 1987: 60 and Nisbet and Hubbard 1979: 109–110.

¹⁷ Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.23–24 Pf.: τὸ μὲν θύοζ ὄττι πάχιστον / θρέψαι, τὴν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὠγαθὲ λεπταλέην; Virg. *Ecl.* 6.4–5: *pastorem, Tityre, pinguis / pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen*. See Ross 1975: 19.

¹⁸ Ross (1975: 155–157) observed both that Vergil was celebrating an end to killing and also that this is the primary significance of wordplay on the *πα-* stem of *Pan*, *pastor*, and *pasco* in *Georg.* 3.1–3, *Aen.* 8.51, and *Tib.* 2.5.25–30.

Apollo is announcing a new golden age and an end to slaughter, which symbolize the end of civil war in Rome.

Horace uses *deducte* in a way that reacts to Vergil's poetic declaration: *o saepe mecum tempus in ultimum / deducte Bruto militiae duce* (2.7.1–2). The phrasing conveys two opposite meanings: that Horace's companion was "often led to face death with Brutus as leader of the army," but also, in a latent secondary sense applicable to the present, that he has been "drawn down from service under rebel leaders," so that he might survive "to the end" and return to Horace as his companion. This "draw down" from the military suggests not only Horace's renunciation of war and politics for the private joys of *amicitia* (*recepto / dulce mihi furere est amico*, 27–28), but what the republic as a whole must do. It is time to take back up the role of *Quirites* (3) and embrace peace under Augustus: "render to Jove the promised thanksgiving, and rest your side, weary from long years of war" (*obligatam redde Iovi dapem / longaue fessum militia latus / depone*, 17–19; one would need to "lay aside" the sword to "recline one's side" upon a banquet couch). In this poem, then, we see Horace's implied renunciation (*recusatio*) of his time serving under Brutus. Not only was their leader not a leader, but Pompeius and Horace were soldiers who were not soldiers, wine-soaked and dripping with perfume (*cum quo morantem saepe diem mero / fregi, coronatus nitentis / malobathro Syrio capillos*, 6–8). He also deprecates his former belief that *virtus* is defined by the fight to save the republic, and praises the sweetness of private life. He further questions whether in a civil war there may not be real confusion about the patriotism and passions that lead men to slaughter one another over what prove to be historical illusions (cf. "the opaque cloud" in which Horace was rescued from the battle by Mercury, *denso . . . aere*, 14).¹⁹ To be worthy of the lives of its sons, a *patria* must foster friendship and justice among citizens. A *patria* that is constantly leading the everyman Pompeius into battle to kill his fellow man is in conflict with the very meaning of the word.²⁰ Horace envisions Philippi as the failure of an Eastern, perfumed conception of manly virtue fighting for an illusion.

The way Vergil uses *pulchrumque mori* and the way Horace depicts the problem of fighting for the *patria* during the civil wars of the late republic make it improbable that Horace was advocating the sweet glory of patriotic death. Sandwiched in between *Carm.* 3.1 and 3.3, which situate the causes of civil war

¹⁹This was probably meant to associate Horace with Paris' shameful rescue from the fight with Menelaus by Aphrodite (*Il.* 3.380–382).

²⁰Rather than a notable member of the Pompeius clan who had fought under Brutus at Philippi (see Quinn 1980: 210), the name probably denotes a generic Eastern provincial ally of the republican (formerly Pompeian) cause, who perhaps went on to fight for Sextus and Antony (*Carm.* 2.7.15–16); see West 1998: 50–54; Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 107. After Pompey's conquests in the East, he granted citizenship to many clientes who took his name: Gruen (1974: 64) cites Cic. *Att.* 1.1.2 and Q. Cic. *Comment. pet.* 5.51. The point then becomes not about specific people, but about the reunification of a divided empire after Actium.

and the fall of the Roman republic in human appetites, *Carm.* 3.2 should be approached as part of the portrait of flaws in the old *patria*. Vergil had treated the problem of glory for a patriotic death at the battle of Pharsalus in *Aen.* 2;²¹ Horace had done the same for Philippi in *Carm.* 2.7. In each case delusion and false appearances cloud the issue of the virtuous man's duty of *virtus* or valor for the patriotic cause. There has been no satisfactory reading of *Carm.* 3.2 that would suggest how Horace could have intended *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* to be an illusion.²² So we are left to reconstruct such a reading from subtle evidence in the text.

CARMEN 3.2

Horace begins *Carm.* 3.2 with a vision of a young Roman boy training to fight the Parthians. Opposite this exemplum of Roman discipline Horace sets his unmanly foe, envisioned from a Homeric-style *teichoskopia*. At line 6 he marks the division with *illum* to conjure *Ilium*.²³

Angustam famicet pauperiem pati
robustus acri militia puer
condiscat et Parthos ferocis
vexet eques metuendus hasta
5 *vitamque sub divo et trepidis agat*
in rebus. illum ex moenibus hosticis
matrona bellantis tyranni
prospiciens et adulta virgo
suspiret, eheu, ne rudis agminum
10 *sponsus lacessat regius asperum*
tactu leonem, quem cruenta
per medias rapit ira caedes.
Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.
mors et fugacem persequitur virum,
15 *nec parcit imbellis iuventae*
poplitibus timidove tergo.

Let the oak-hard youth learn to suffer with a smile rough poverty in hard military training, and harass the fierce Parthians on horseback, and be feared for his lance, leading a life out in the open in danger. Let the wife of the warring tyrant, as she spies him from behind enemy walls, and the mature virgin gasp, "Oh, let not my royal fiancé, inexperienced in battle, provoke even with a touch that rough lion, whom bloody wrath takes into the middle of the slaughter." It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. Death catches even the man who flees, and spares not the unwarlike knees and timid back of youth.

²¹Cf. Bowie 1990.

²²Dingel 2003: 399. Funke (1997: 78–84) offers a comprehensive survey of the positions that have been taken.

²³Compare Vergil's elision of *Ilium* et at *Aen.* 2.235. Text is Shackleton Bailey's Teubner (1985).

The ode looks forward to a campaign against the Parthians that the Romans have anticipated since Carrhae. At the same time, it suggests the past through an almost impenetrable muddle of four or five different scenes from *Iliad*: an epic simile on the second encounter of Aeneas and Achilles, comparing Achilles to a lion who ignores encircling hunters until he is struck (*Il.* 20.161–352);²⁴ the first *teichoskopia* when Helen watches her fiancé, Paris, fight against her husband, Menelaus, who is also compared to a lion in an epic simile (*Il.* 3.21–29, 161–244); the warning of Hecuba to Hector not to fight Achilles (*Il.* 22.82–89), together with the wailing of Andromache when he dies (*Il.* 22.460–515);²⁵ and Priam’s ironic foreshadowing of how the young warrior is beautiful in death but he, Priam, will be eaten by his own dogs (*Il.* 22.71–74).²⁶

This collage seems to recall Vergil’s two systems of imagery in *Aeneid*, first with Aeneas as Paris, the suitor and man of passion (Books 1–4), and then as Hector, the defender of civilization (Books 9–12). The first half of this poem depicts Homer’s Paris–Aeneas as a suitor unequal to Achilles, and the doomed Hector as a man over whom the women lament. The Vergilian portrait of the defender of civilization comes in the second half of the ode.

There is, however, some debate as to the cast of this vignette. Nisbet and Rudd (2004: 25–26) suggest that the *bellantis tyranni* and the *regius sponsus* are different people, that the *matrona* is the wife of the tyrant, the *adulta virgo* his daughter, and the *regius sponsus* her fiancé. The Homeric allusions to Helen watching Paris, and to Hecuba and Andromache wailing over Hector, would suggest that the maiden is the daughter-in-law, and the *regius sponsus* the son.²⁷ Horace puts two more bits of confusion in the way of this interpretation: the “warring” tyrant would not then actually fight, and the “gazing” and “gasping” of the women is expressed in the singular, *prospiciens . . . suspiret*, to agree with the closest subject in Latin, as if the wife only gazes, and the maiden only gasps. All, of course, are perfectly possible, but we are invited to consider why the tyrant is given the epithet *bellantis*, and why the *matrona* is joined to the *adulta virgo*, yet each is prevented from sharing the other’s verb, when both clearly apply to both. Nisbet and Rudd (2004: 26) detect a *zeugma* in *suspiret*, on the grounds that it is properly a “lover’s sigh” only appropriate to the *virgo*, yet it seems to apply to the *matrona* as well.

If we turn to the question of whose death is imagined in *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, it makes no sense to assume it is the Roman youth training for battle

²⁴ Kiessling–Heinze 1930: 1.257–258.

²⁵ Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 25.

²⁶ Quinn 1980: 245. I do not discount the possibility of influence from the Hellenistic literary tradition noted by Nisbett and Rudd (2004: 25), but the allusions to a Paris-like suitor are more important to an understanding of the ode’s relation to the Homeric imagery, which is being used to create an Augustan iconography about Antony as a suitor of Cleopatra, as we see in Vergil’s comparison of the young Aeneas at the court of Dido to a Paris-like suitor.

²⁷ Quinn 1980: 245.

against fierce Parthians, since the royal fiancé is described as “inexperienced in battle” (*rudis agminum*, 3.2.9).²⁸ When the women see the hard Roman youth, they immediately fear that their prince will die; and it seems unimaginable that the tough Roman soldier will lose to the weaker man. We are thus confused by the appeal to *patria*, since line 13 seems to apply not to the oak scion of Rome, but to some Paris-type from the East whose father is a tyrant. This statement comes at the conclusion of the first half of the poem, which is in tension with the second half, where all this un-Roman cowardice meets with the theme of *virtus*:²⁹

*Virtus repulsae nescia sordidae
intaminatis fulget honoribus,
nec sumit aut ponit securis
20 arbitrio popularis aerae.
Virtus, recludens immeritis mori
caelum, negata temptat iter via
coetusque vulgaris et udam
spernit humum fugiente penna.
25 est et fideli tuta silentio
merces: vetabo, qui Cereris sacrum
vulgarit arcanæ, sub isdem
sit trabibus fragilemque mecum
solvat phaselon. saepe Diespiter
30 neglectus incesto addidit integrum.
raro antecedentem scelestum
deseruit pede Poena claudo.*

Virtue, ignorant of foul defeat, shines in uncorrupted office, neither does it take up or put down the axes when the decision of the crowd changes with the wind. Virtue opens up heaven for those who do not deserve to die, and attempts the journey by the way that is barred, spurning vulgar mobs and the wet ground on fleeing wing. There is a safe reward also for faithful silence: I will forbid the one who profanes the holy secrets of mysterious Ceres to be under my roof, or to launch in a fragile skiff with me. Often Father Jupiter, when neglected, has lumped the man of integrity in with the impure, and seldom has Punishment, lame on one foot, abandoned the trail of the wicked man who goes before her.

The sense of *virtus* envisioned here is no longer Simonides' glory-centered *aretê*. The world of the warrior's manly courage in the first half of the poem is supplanted by the virtues of Augustan peace, symbolized by the statesman, whose courage in office earns him immortality and suggests *pietas*, represented here as a combination of reverence and divine justice.

²⁸Quinn 1980: 245.

²⁹On the division of Horatian Odes into halves by a modulation of theme at the center of the poem, see Moritz 1968.

Not only are the two halves of the poem in conflict, but every level of the poem is at war with itself. Each half contains its own internal conflict, as the first and third quarters have a masculine dimension set against a feminine dimension in the second and fourth quarters: stanzas 1–2 show the world of the soldier in combat, set against stanzas 3–4 with the wailing women and the feminine *patria* and *iuventae*; stanzas 5–6 treat the statesman’s manly virtue, set against stanzas 7–8 with depictions of the goddesses Ceres and Poena, who represent the feminine virtues *pietas* and justice.³⁰

Martial virtue	{	Soldier’s life of combat	Stanza 1 Roman
			Stanza 2 Parthian
	{	Women’s fear of death for (f.) <i>patria, iuventa</i>	Stanza 3 Cry of women to live
			Stanza 4 Menace of death
Virtues of peace	{	Statesman’s <i>virtus</i>	Stanza 5 Virtue in earthly politics
			Stanza 6 Virtue’s journey to heaven
	{	Ceres and Poena (f.) represent	Stanza 7 Friend of Ceres
		(f.) virtues <i>pietas</i> and <i>iustitia</i>	Stanza 8 Enemy of Diespiter and Poena

Each stanza, in turn, is in conflict with the next: Roman vs. Parthian; the outcry to flee and live vs. the menace of death; virtue in earthly politics vs. the journey of the virtuous to heaven; the friend of Ceres vs. the enemy of Diespiter-Poena. Even at the level of the line, word fights against neighboring word. *Angustam/amice* (difficult conditions borne with a smile); *robustus/puer* (the oak-hard child); *ferocis/metuendus* (fierce Parthians who fear the Roman); *sub divo/ex moenibus* (out in the open vs. behind walls); *bellantis/prospiciens* (fighting vs. watching); *rudis/asperum* (new to battle vs. rough); *tactul/rapit* (touch vs. seize); *dulce/decorum, mori* (sweetness vs. duty and death); *fugaces/persequitur* (flee vs. pursue); *nec parcat/timido* (merciless vs. timid).

The conflict continues in the second half: *virtus/nescia* (virtue vs. ignorance); *sordidael/intaminatis fulget* (filth vs. shines unsullied); *sumit/ponit* (take up vs. lay down); *arbitrio/aurae* (judgement vs. whim); *virtus/immeritis* (virtuous vs. undeserving); *recludens/negata* (open vs. denied access); *caelum/humum* (heaven vs. ground); *coetus/fugiente* (coming together vs. fleeing); *vulgarit/spernit* (coarse vs. discerning); *udam/penna* (wet vs. dry feather); *fideli silentio, sacrum arcanae/vulgarit* (faithful silence of a hidden secret vs. profaning); *tuta . . . merces/vetabo* (safe reward vs. ban as dangerous); *trabibus/fragilem phaselon* (solid home vs. fragile vessel at sea); *saepel/raro* (often vs. seldom); *neglectus/deseruit* (neglected by others vs. deserting others); *incesto/integrum* (impurity vs. integrity); *antecedentem/pede . . . claudio* (racing ahead vs. club-footed); *scelestum/Poena* (the wicked man and his punisher).

³⁰West (2002: 28) compares Ceres here to Vergil’s Proserpina/Juno Inferna, to whom the golden bough is offered in veneration for what she represents (*venerabile donum*, 6.408, which seems to be related to *pietas* itself, 6.403, 405).

The dissonance between *dulce et decorum* and *mori* demonstrates that the organizing principle is not mere antithesis but oxymoron—an irrational internal contradiction. This conflict of sense reflects the political passions that drove Rome so often into war: *bellantis tyranni* functions neatly as a symbol by hypallage for “the tyranny of war” that destroyed the old republic.³¹ Like the women in the *teichoskopia*, we too are watching a battle. The two halves of the poem suggest two very different visions of Rome, the first a city at war in a scene full of passions and tyranny, and the second, a city at peace, led by a pious and just statesman. This is brought out by a parallelism between the two halves of the poem: the young Roman warrior with his lance (stanza 1) becomes the virtuous statesman with the axes of office (stanza 5); the youth’s life spent in the open (*sub divo*, stanza 2) is answered by the opening up of heaven for the virtuous (stanza 6); the gasping cry of the women (stanza 3) is answered by the silence of the faithful initiate (stanza 7); and death’s pursuit of the fleeing coward (stanza 4) is answered by Poena’s dogged pursuit of the wicked (stanza 8).

The division between war and peace recalls the organization of the shields of Achilles (*Il.* 18.478–617) and Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.675–728).³² It turns out there is more than a passing similarity of structure and language between this ode and Vergil’s vision of the battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas. Vergil first describes the combatants (*Aen.* 8.675–688), then the battle (689–703), then the terror and flight of Cleopatra in terms that suggest her death (704–713), ending with a portrait of the *pietas* and triumph of Octavian (714–728). Horace also portrays the combatants, then their fight, and concludes the first half of the ode with themes of flight and death; in the second half, mixed in with the pious devotion to Ceres and reverence for divine justice, he provides triumphal imagery (*fulget honoribus*, 18; *recludens immeritis mori / caelum*, 21–22; *merces*, 26; and the hint of a procession to the Capitol with the conquered in chains, *temptat iter via . . . Diespiter . . . antecedentem scelestum*, 22, 29, 31).

Vergil emphasizes leadership, using the verb *ago* of Octavian (678) and Agrippa (683), and calling Apollo “Actian,” not just for the name of the shrine “by the shore” (ἄκτῆ), but as if playing upon the verbal ἄκτέον (“one must lead”). So also he uses *sequor* to suggest Cleopatra’s failure as a leader (688), while at the same time using its other sense (“following” winds and fortunes of war: *ventis secundis*, 682; *sequitur Bellona*, 703) to suggest Octavian’s “favor” with the gods. Horace does the same by portraying the Roman youth as a leader (*agat*, 5), while death “follows” his foe who is associated with Eastern tyranny (*persequitur*, 14). Vergil says that as Cleopatra prepares for battle, she “does not yet view behind her” the approaching twin snakes of Nemesis (*necdum a tergo*

³¹Priam may be a significant referent also. Vergil uses the death of Priam in *Aen.* 2.554–558 to suggest Pompey’s end in Egypt after the fall of the republic at Pharsalus.

³²Hardie (1986: 358–362) notes the division of the Actium scene on Vergil’s Shield of Aeneas into war and peace, which creates a parallel with Homer’s Shield of Achilles.

respicit, 697). Later the Eastern forces are filled with “terror” at the sight of Apollo, and “show their backs” (*eo terrore . . . vertebant terga*, 705–706). Cleopatra “calls upon” the winds (*vocatis*, 707), and “amid the slaughter, turns white at the thought of her impending death” (*inter caedes pallentem morte futura*, 709). So also Horace says that as the women “view” the battle, they “gasped” amid the “slaughter” and cry out (*prospiciens*, 8; *suspiret*, 9; *per medias caedes*, 12); and the poet envisions death catching the man who flees (*mors et fugacem persequitur*, 14) and refusing to spare “the timid back” (*timidove tergo*, 16). Vergil portrays both Octavian and Cleopatra as fighting *pro patria* (Octavian has the senate and people at his side, *cum patribus populoque*, and his father’s sign of divine favor, *patrium sidus*, 679–681; Cleopatra summons her forces with her native rattle, *patrio sistro*, 696); and in Horace we have *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (13).

Vergil’s descriptions of Octavian sacrificing at the altars and reviewing the triumph from the Temple of Apollo also have subtle parallels in Horace’s ode. Vergil begins by saying that Octavian “rode through the Roman walls” and the “streets were roaring with joy and games and applause” (*triplici invectus Romana triumpho moenia . . . laetitia ludisque viae plausuque fremebant*, 8.714–717). Horace captures the applause of the people, which the virtuous man does not allow to affect the performance of his duty (*arbitrio popularis aerae*, 20), much like Vergil’s Octavian, who, rather than basking in adulation, immediately fulfills his vows and sacrifices to the gods (8.715–716). Horace captures the triumphal parade to the Temple of Apollo with the “journey to heaven,” whose gates virtue “opens up” for the statesman (*recludens caelum . . . temptat iter*, 21–22). As the slaughter of war (*caedes*, 8.695, 709) gives way to a new slaughter of peace, with bullocks “strewing the ground” before every altar (*terram caesi stravere iuvencti*, 8.719), Vergil contrasts the bloody ground with the gleaming white temple of Apollo (*niveo candentis limine Phoebi*, 8.720). Horace captures the sense of this contrast in his description of virtue as “ignorant of foul (defeat), and gleaming with undefiled (honors)” (*nescia sordidae / intaminatis fulget*, 17–18), and “spurning the wet ground” (*udam / spernit humum*, 23–24).

Vergil’s shield concludes with Augustus acknowledging “gifts” of laurels which he affixes to his “door-posts” (*dona . . . postibus*, 721–722). Then the conquered peoples file by “as varied in tongues as in dress and arms” (*quam variae linguis, habitu tam vestis et armis*, 723). Bringing up the rear of the parade we see the pacified races from the ends of the earth, some so remote that their defining characteristic is a river, the last of which is the Araxes, “indignant at being bridged” (*pontem indignatus*, 726–728). Horace alludes to the “gifts” by *merces*, the reward for faithful silence (25–26); to the varied and obscure mob of nations by the verb *vulgarit* (27) and by the adjectives *neglectus* and *raro* (30–31); to the doorposts by the “roof-beams” of his home (*trabibus*, 28); to the river imagery by “launching a skiff” (*solvat phaselon*, 29); and to the indignation of the previously

“unconquered” peoples (*indomiti*, 8.728) by Poena’s “refusal to desert” the trail of the unjust (*non deseruit*, 32).

If we are right to think that the borrowing was from Vergil to Horace, on the assumption that important parts of *Aeneid* were performed in Rome and known to Horace before publication,³³ the net effect of the correspondences with Vergil’s *ephrasis* is to suggest that Horace’s ode is built upon the same image: a shield that depicts the battle of Actium. Horace invites us to imagine a battle of two conceptions of *virtus*: its military sense from the old republic as “manly courage in battle,” which calls Antony to mind; and the philosophical sense of “virtue” that arises from the *clupeus aureus* awarded by the senate (“for courage, clemency, justice, and piety,” *virtutis clementiaeque et iustitiae et pietatis causa*, RG 34)³⁴ when it hailed Octavian as statesman with the name *Augustus*, which connotes “reverence” (*sacrum*, 26; cf. *sacrabat*, *Aen.* 8.715).

In this context, Horace’s ode begins to read very differently. The brave young Roman in training for war with the Parthians suggests the world of Antony, who fights like a lion and lives by the motto that death in battle is glorious. The frightened gasps of the women recall Cleopatra’s behavior at Actium, where she fled before Antony even had a chance to engage his main squadrons. The phrase *adulta virgo* has an intertextual relation to *adultos fetus* in Vergil’s famous bee simile (*Aen.* 1.431–432): the “newly matured offspring” ready for love symbolize Aeneas and Dido, whose passionate affair recalls the liaisons of Caesar and Antony with the young Cleopatra (*adulter, adultero*).³⁵ Horace’s use of *matrona*,

³³ Vergil performed parts of *Aeneid* in a theatre to riotous applause in his lifetime (Tac. *Dial.* 13.2). O’Rourke (2011: 471) notes that in the *Life of Vergil*, he is said to have composed the first stages of *Aeneid* in a prose outline (*Donat. Vit. Verg.* 23–24 Hardie). Prop. 2.34.61–66, completed soon after the death of Gallus in 26 B.C. (2.34.91), offers a *recusatio* of epic that reveals how the depiction of Actium on the shield was likely written first or early in the process: “Vergil can tell of the Actian shores guarded by Phoebus and the fleet of bold Caesar. Even now he is calling forth the arms of Trojan Aeneas and raising walls on Lavinian shores” (*Actia Vergili<um> custodis litora Phoebi / Caesaris et fortis dicere posse ratis / qui nunc Aeneae Troiani suscitavit arma / iactaque Lavinis moenia litoribus*, 2.34.61–64 Fedeli). *Actia litora* could be taken as an allusion to the wordplay on Actium in *oris* and *litora* at *Aen.* 1.1–2, but the mention of *fortis ratis Caesaris* in line 62 suggests the depiction of a naval battle; it is a thorny subject for which O’Rourke (2011: 466–471) provides extensive bibliography. See also the bibliography in Kiessling-Heinze 1930: 1.637 on dating *Carm.* 3.2 to 27 B.C.

³⁴ See Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 22; Jameson 1984: 233–234. On the place of the shield in Augustan iconography of this period, see Galinsky 1996: 80–90.

³⁵ Cf. Benario 1970 and Tarrant 1997: 178. Pease (1935: 23–29, at 26) argues that in some scenes Dido and Aeneas should be compared to Cleopatra and Antony, and in others to Cleopatra and Julius Caesar, or to Cleopatra and Octavian; cf. Quinn 1968: 55. As Aeneas marvels at the building of Carthage (*Aen.* 1.418–440), we may think first of Caesar’s admiration for Alexandria (Suet. *Iul.* 44, 79; cf. *caesariem nato genitrix*, *Aen.* 1.590). In Aeneas’ hopes for easy empire and in the “offspring just grown” in the bee simile (*adultos . . . fetus*, 1.431–432) situated in amatory imagery (flowing honey in the swollen comb, *stipant* perhaps playing upon the phallic *stipes*, and “receiving

a distinctly Roman name for a “wife” in this Greek vignette, recalls that Antony at one time had both Cleopatra as an *adultera* and Octavia as his *matrona*, and that after his divorce in 32, his Ptolemaic Greek *adultera* became his *matrona*.³⁶ This provides an organic significance for Horace’s use of zeugma to enforce a verbal unity upon *matrona* and *adulta uirgo*. We now begin to suspect that line 13, our motto for the ages, is situated in the old republic half of the poem, in the feminine quarter pertaining to the passion-tossed adulteress become wife, and the stanza of death, to suggest the sweetness of the death of Cleopatra for the Romans. Three facts support such a conclusion. First, she is the only person who chose to die for her country. Roman deaths in the civil wars—even when those wars were presented as foreign wars against Cleopatra—seem to go without mention, let alone patriotic glory, in imperial propaganda; and Antony died not *pro patria*, but *pro Cleopatra*. Second, the Simonidean intertext speaks of patriotic death as winning eternal *kleos*, which creates paronomasia upon her name, “glory for one’s country.” And third, in his “Cleopatra Ode” (1.37), Horace portrays her as fleeing from Octavian like a dove before a hawk (16–20), recalling the description of Achilles’ pursuit of Hector like a hawk chasing a “timid” dove that “trembles” and flies with “swift knees” (τρήρωνα . . . τρέσει . . . λαιψηρὰ δὲ γούνατ’, *Il.* 22.140–144). Horace alludes to that same Homeric passage here with *fugacem virum* and *poplitibus timidove*.³⁷

Antony, however, is not just the Roman youth, but also the warring tyrant and the royal suitor. The phrase *rudis agminum* (“inexperienced in battle”) recalls how he mocked Octavian for his physical weakness and for his dependence on Agrippa in battle (Suet. *Aug.* 16.2). At the battle of Actium, however, it was Antony who was inexperienced in naval warfare (Plut. *Ant.* 62; Cass. Dio 50.29–30), whose land forces went unused, and who wound up fleeing the battle rather than fighting to the death, driven to remain by the side of Cleopatra.

Amid this contest of epithets between Octavian and Antony for who possesses *virtus*, “manly virtue,” the poem performs two noteworthy feats of imperial iconography: it redefines the concept of *virtus* itself, and suggests how the imagery that points to Antony is usurped and transformed by Octavian. Antony’s conception of manliness was that of the tough Roman youth learning to live in the open and campaign against the Parthians, as he himself did. It is often

the loads of the ones coming,” 1.432–434), the simile evokes both the youth of Cleopatra in her affair with Caesar, and the infatuation of Antony that gives the impression of young love (App. *B Civ.* 5.8.1).

³⁶ Putnam (1998: 142) draws attention to Vergil’s use of the exclamatory *nefas* in the ephrasis of the shield (8.688) when Cleopatra is called Antony’s *Aegyptia coniunx*.

³⁷ The parallel usually adduced is with Simonides fr. 524, ὁ δ’ αὖ θάνατος κίχεται τὸν φυγόμενον (“death pursues even the man who flees”), but Nisbet and Rudd (2004: 27–28) suggest why that might not be right; and the Homeric allusion better accounts for the vocabulary of *poplitibus timidove*.

assumed that since the third book of Horace's *Odes* was published in 23 B.C., this is the imagined time of the poem. The first word, *ANGustam*, however, is one stroke away from suggesting the name AVGustus, who, as a boy of 18, also prepared for a Parthian campaign with Caesar. This is the same word Vergil uses earlier in the same book of *Aeneid* (8.366) to describe the low door to the poor hut of Evander, which proved the humble virtue of the conquering Hercules as he stooped to enter.³⁸ *Carm.* 3.2 stands out as the shortest of the "Roman Odes" at a mere eight stanzas, perhaps as a tribute to OCTAVian, whose virtues it celebrates. By clothing the portrait of Antony in a vignette that also describes Octavian, Horace is inviting us to view the contest of epithets (including the mantle of Hercules) also as a *Bildungsroman* of the Roman republic, in which both the *puer* and the *regius sponsus* portray the old state, with its naive, vulgar, adolescent conception of manliness, rooted in war, maturing into a higher, more philosophical conception, rooted in peace.³⁹ We see a movement from the vulgar virtue of the tyrant, who fights to keep his power and the good opinion of his fiancée (i.e., in satisfaction of his own amatory and political *eros*), to the divine merit of the statesman who puts *pietas* and justice before self.

The poem mocks the "vulgar" in a sustained way in the second half—*intaminatis* (17); *popularis aurae* (20); *coetus vulgaris* (23); *udam humum* (23–24)—after which the profanely common (*vulgarit*, 27) becomes associated with the impious and the unjust (*incesto . . . scelestum*, 30–31). It was Antony who, in contrast to the statesman in stanza 5, displayed his political coarseness by running naked at the Lupercalia in 44 and consulting the mood of the mob about crowning Caesar (Cic. *Phil.* 2.85–87, Suet. *Caes.* 79; *arbitrio popularis aurae*, 20).⁴⁰ It was Antony whom Cicero mocked for his vulgar drunken parties and vomit-inducing hangovers (*Phil.* 2.63; *coetus vulgaris . . . udam . . . humum*, 23–24),

³⁸Drew 1927: 39. Bailey (1928: 32) dismisses Drew's identification of Aeneas with Augustus in this scene on the basis of *angusti*, but the contexts of Horace and Vergil are nearly identical, and the wordplay gives good sense. In order to become *Augustus*, i.e., "worthy of a kind of divine reverence," a leader must demonstrate virtue, which in traditional Roman morality includes Stoic restraint, austerity, and humility, as exhibited by the Catos or by Cincinnatus returning to his plow (cf. Hor. *Carm.* 3.1.47–48, 3.6.5, and the rustic idyll ending the "Roman Odes," 3.6.37–44).

³⁹Bridge (1947: 350) rightly sees an allusion to "Dream of Scipio," though his hypothesis that the Ode is meant as a great tribute to Cicero need not follow. *Aen.* 6.679–751 demonstrates that the Augustan poets were prepared to accept Cicero's imagery and philosophical contributions without ever praising the name of the orator (cf. his omission from the shield in *Aen.* 8.666–670), so closely associated with the old order that it could not be mentioned. Kiessling and Heinze (1930: 259) note related Ciceronian parallels at *Tusc.* 1.27 and *Rep.* 1.25. West (2002: 27) summarizes the doctrines at work behind the Stoic or Neo-Pythagorean conception of the apotheosis of the virtuous, of which Hercules is the exemplar.

⁴⁰App. *B Civ.* 2.109; Plut. *Caes.* 61; Suet. *Iul.* 79; Cic. *Phil.* 2.34. Concerning the word *arbitrio*, Jameson (1983: 233–235) compares *Res Gestae* 1.34, *rem publicam ex mea potestate in senatus populi que Romani arbitrium transtuli* ("I transferred the republic from my power to the discretion of the senate and the Roman people"), and suggests that the echo is meant as an allusion to the "restoration of

and Antony who famously scampered into Cleopatra's *phaselon* at Actium (Plut. *Ant.* 66–67). Horace may even have given a signpost of this interpretation, if *antecedentem scelestum* (31) is meant to be an alliterative onomatopoeia on the name “Marcus Antonius,” emphasizing how the man who famously “went before his men” into battle now “preceded them” from Actium.

Jameson (1984: 229–230) has argued that the phrase *qui Cereris sacrum vulgarit arcanae* (“the one who profanes the holy secrets of mysterious Ceres,” 26–27) alludes to Gallus, who is alleged to have gotten drunk and divulged some unknown secret that offended Augustus (*Caesaris sacrum?*).⁴¹ Even if Gallus is meant, he may still be another shade of the imagery surrounding Antony and Cleopatra, who preceded him as rulers of Egypt and “profaned” the sacred in their own way. Antony had done so by boarding a boat with Cleopatra on a prior occasion: after Philippi, he went to Athens and was initiated into the mysteries, after which he sailed to Ephesus, where he was hailed as Dionysus incarnate, with the whole city tricked out like a Bacchic *thiasos* (Plut. *Ant.* 24).⁴² From there he went on to meet Cleopatra at Tarsus on her pleasure barge, where it was said that Aphrodite had come to revel with Bacchus (Plut. *Ant.* 25–26), and the two were oblivious to Antony's marriage to Fulvia or to any implications of sacrilege. Dio Cassius tells us that Octavian was also initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries as his first act after departing from Actium (51.4.1), no doubt to suggest both a parallel and a contrast with the behavior of Antony a decade earlier.

The poem celebrates the triumph of the iconography of Octavian over that of Antony. The unexpected corollary is that the poem was written so that its imagery would function one way in reference to Antony and the opposite way in reference to Octavian.⁴³ There is a reversal at work behind the imagery of the *teichoskopia*, in which a warlike Roman likened to Achilles faces off against a timid suitor likened to Aeneas. We assume that we are watching Antony's triumph over some weakling, but we can also read it as the battle of Actium,

the republic” and the *clupeus virtutis* in 27 B.C. She argues for the Octavian reading of the line, in which the poet portrays him as the virtuous man who resists the seductions of glory.

⁴¹Jameson (1984: 229–231) connects Ovid *Tr.* 2.445–446, “It did not bring disgrace upon Gallus that he celebrated Lycoris; but that from an excess of wine he did not hold his tongue” (*non fuit opprobrio celebrasse Lycorida Gallo / sed linguam nimio non tenuisse mero*, with *Carm.* 1.18.14–16, where Horace associates drunkenness with vainglory and betrayal of secrets, and Cass. Dio 53.23, in which Gallus is said to have erected statues of himself all over Egypt.

⁴²Bacchus was often associated with the Iacchus cry in the mysteries (Ar. *Ran.* 316–336; Plut. *Alc.* 34.3).

⁴³Connor (1972: 242–244) illustrates the confusion the poem can elicit when read at the literal level. His argument adds to the appeal of this “dueling referents” strategy. Davis (1983: 12) wishes to deny the “diptych” reading of the ode as two divided halves which would entail “an unannounced change in the meaning of *virtus*.” The ode actually does turn out to be a contest to define *virtus*, though not quite a diptych, since the two halves are unified by the military and political competition of Antony and Octavian, and the question of how *virtus* must change under the new order.

where Cleopatra panicked at the thought of her husband being killed by the Romans. As in Vergil's epic, the man of peaceful virtues emerges as the military victor, when Horace's Octavian, the defender of *pietas*, defeats the martial and vulgar Antony, making him look *uxorius* and cowardly. The theme of reversal is also foretold by line 13 itself, which alludes to the defeat at Thermopylae that became the rallying cry to victory over tyrannical forces from the East. The associations of reversal, moreover, are integral to the Augustan iconography of Actium, in which Apollo is portrayed as the archer god of Nemesis on the shield of Aeneas (*Aen.* 8.696–706), and as an avenger upon barbarians who dare to make war on him as god of civilization or impiously mock the gods, as we see on the doors of the Temple of Palatine Apollo (*Prop.* 2.31.12–14). The justice of Jupiter, which takes the form of Poena in Horace's poem (29–32), is alluding not (or not only) to the parochial problem of whatever impiety Gallus committed in Egypt, but to the larger imperial problem of impiety and injustice behind a century of war and rebellion culminating at Actium, which the poets focus on the characters of Antony and Cleopatra.

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori is fundamentally about a Greek idea of glory that stands as a symbol of the appetite for fame that drove the old republic into wars until it seemed to be in love with death; it is thus not intended by Horace as a fitting motto for the new Rome. The virtues of peace in the second half of the poem do not complement but replace these Greek ideals. As a *Bildungsroman* on the rehabilitation of Roman morality, Horace's portrait begins with two competing youths, and alternates masculine and feminine stanzas to suggest how the corrupt exempla of Antony and Cleopatra are supplanted by a revival of male and female virtue in a mature Rome. From such a plan, one can see this ode as a forerunner of *Carmen saeculare*, which was composed for performance by choruses of boys and girls on opposing hills in Rome to herald the dawn of a new golden age and the "return of neglected *Virtus*" (*neglecta redire Virtus*, *Carm. saec.* 58).

For Horace, *Carm.* 3.2 is a poetic Battle of Actium, in which the traditional conception of *virtus*, identified with the East and manliness in war, is defeated by the new virtues of peace, personified by the Roman statesman from the West. This poem is also an illustration of how the *vates* should fight: not on the battlefield, indulging in the passions of war, but in the "sweet danger" of poetic campaigning (*dulce periculum*, *Carm.* 3.25.18; *Epod.* 1.3, 1.8, 9.37–38). *Carm.* 3.2 helps to define the meaning of the Battle of Actium for Roman civilization, which is a greater contribution to the fight than Horace could make as a soldier. The poem cuts from vignette to vignette in a way that suggests moral development: we first meet a Roman youth acquiring courage and strength in battle; then we see a little *Iliad* with an Eastern warrior facing a "rough lion," who seems to be the Roman warrior all grown up; then we encounter *Virtus* first personified as a statesman, then as a philosophical soul. The statesman does not deserve the fate of death but merits heaven for his labors, like Hercules, because

“the path he tries by the way denied” (*negata temptat iter via*, 22) is the steep path to heaven accessible only to the soul that has sprouted wings (*spernit humum fugiente penna*, 24) after being freed from the body and from the desire, fear, and other passions that arise from contact with it.⁴⁴ There is one final moral evolution when the soul is imagined in community with the gods. The poet, whose teaching is leading this development, asserts his fidelity to what is right in the eyes of the gods, above company with anyone who engages in impiety or injustice. The emphatic first person “I will forbid” (*vetabo*, 26) asserts the poet’s prerogative to portray the moral dimension of events that define civilization.

There remains a final word to be said about the problems of memory and history. When teaching Horace, we should point out Brecht’s instinctual loathing (above, 59, note 2) of an iconography that gives absolutism the appearance of virtue; yet this historical judgement must be balanced with the things that Horace gets right. This poem articulates the superiority of the civilized virtues of peace over the individual pursuit of glory in war. Augustan claims of Roman cultural superiority over Greek civilization direct the reader to reflect upon Rome’s own republican past. Horace performs an autopsy on the passions that led to the fall of the senatorial oligarchy: the rights claimed by magistrates to pursue their ambitions, paid for by the whole world in blood and treasure, meant that every consul and corrupt governor was his own *bellans tyrannus*.

We have been too blinded by the sentimental appeal of *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* to appreciate Horace’s point that misguided patriotism can be a destructive passion. Even the poets of the First World War, whose experience of its horrors made them suspicious of sentimental appeals to the *patria*, failed to observe that the connections between nostalgic sentiment, misguided notions of manly virtue, and the passion for war are precisely what Horace is criticizing.

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⁴⁴Horace is appealing to Hercules imagery, associated with the rescue of the philosopher from Plato’s cave (Pl. *Rep.* 7.514a–520e), and the apotheosis of poets and statesmen in Cicero’s “Dream of Scipio” (Cic. *Rep.* 6.17, 22 Powell); cf. Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 22.

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