

Better Than the Father: Horace's Appropriation of Homer in *Odes* 1.15

Even casual perusal of Horace's *Odes* 1.15 reveals that the lyric is an adaptation of Homeric epic. With its internal speaker Nereus prophesying the far-reaching consequences of Paris and Helen's elopement, the "persevering" or painstaking Horatian poem might appear to derivatively restate the *Iliad* (Nisbet and Hubbard 1975). However, in reality, Horace's work ambitiously competes with Homer's. The agonistic spirit of *Odes* 1.15 appears through an allusion in line 28, describing the Achaean warrior Diomedes as *melior patre* (better than his father). This expression refers to a Homeric retort by Diomedes' charioteer, ἡμεῖς τοι πατέροων μέγ' ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι ("for my part, I boast to you that we are better than our fathers"), provoked by the suggestion that Diomedes failed to live up to his father's example (Homer 4.370-405). I argue that the theme of striving with a glorious parent inhabits both *melior patre* and Horace's entire poem. Indeed, metaphorical familial tension between the "father" Homer and "child" Horace provides a lens through which readers can give *Odes* 1.15 the attention it deserves. This paper shows that *Odes* 1.15 contends with its literary parent, Homer's *Iliad*, in its epic theme, narrative style, and temporal structure.

Thematically, the lyric engages with Homer by deviating from Horace's poetic norms. Although *Odes* 1.6.6 renounces epic topics and 1.15.15 characterizes Paris as a lover singing *imbelli cithara* ("with an unwarlike lyre"), the poem generally discusses an epic subject: the tragic results of Paris and Helen's affair and breach of *xenia* (hospitality, Athanassaki 2002; Mayer 2012). Horace even outdoes Homer by extending blame for the escapade to Helen through the synchysis in 1.15.1-2's *Pastor ... Helenen perfidus hospitam* (the faithless shepherd, Helen his hostess). Despite the clear grammatical connection between *perfidus* and *pastor*, Horace's word order implies that Helen the *hospitam* could be called *perfida*, complicating

Homer's portrayal.

Odes 1.15 also reworks Homer stylistically. Rather than talking to an external addressee and aligning with Horace's customary practice, the poem's internal speaker Nereus apostrophizes an internal addressee: Paris. Similar internal discourse runs throughout Homer's *Iliad*, and Homeric parallels continue in Horace's narrative structure. *Odes* 1.15's initial speaker does not interact with characters directly, as many Horatian speakers do. Rather, (s)he narrates as an omniscient speaker like Homer's. However, unlike the Homeric speaker, the Horatian one never invokes a muse. When combined with Horace's epic subject, this seemingly trivial dissimilarity gains greater possible significance. Homer begins his *Iliad* with ἄειδε θεά (sing, goddess), asking for her inspiration (Homer 1.1). By omitting this invocation, perhaps Horace portrays his speaker as a divinely inspired *vates* (poet-prophet), without the need to invoke a muse (OLD 2009). On the other hand, Horace's alteration could simply represent one of the "all sorts of ways" Horace transforms oral epic into written lyric (Lowrie 1997). In either case, Horace's break with established epic patterns underscores his competition with Homer by investing his speaker with prophetic and/or Homeric authority.

Finally, *Odes* 1.15's temporal and poetic structure completes Horace's reimagination of Homer. Despite the initial speaker's past tense verbs, *Odes* 1.15 primarily consists of Nereus' prophecy about how future events will affect Paris. Homer's prophecies usually have a sequential structure in which the prophet in the present sees occurrences in the future. However, Nereus' prophecy transcends temporal boundaries, mixing future and present tense verbs as if the prophet perceives future incidents as present events (Athanasaki 2002; Putnam 2006). Horace abbreviates not only Homer's prophetic temporal framework, but also the *Iliad* itself, using compact structure and allusions. Therefore, Horace transforms Homer's extensive epic into a

slender lyric, condensing time both inside and outside *Odes* 1.15.

As an appropriation of Homer's *Iliad*, Horace's poem competes with its parent-text more than might first appear. Going beyond mere connection, Horace's poem strives to surpass Homer by complicating *xenia*, claiming authority, and collapsing timelines within its prophetic narrative. Thus, *Odes* 1.15 boasts that it, like Diomedes, is *melior patre* (Horace 1.15.28).

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