

ESSAY 17

Discuss two major differences between the lyric verse of Horace and Catullus.

The Roman lyric genre indicated a movement from the tradition of epic and tragic poetry of individuals such as Ennius, to a romantic and subjective style. Despite being categorised in the same lyric literary genre, Neoterics Horace and Catullus differentiate in two fundamental areas of their writing; the thematic concerns of their poetry and the stylistic constructions of their lyric verse.

Throughout his corpus, Catullus displays an overt repetition of his key thematic concerns, such as his preoccupation with the dichotomies of everlasting love and fierce resentment, camaraderie and injurious betrayal. Such thematic concerns can truly be attributed to what E. A. Havelock labels as ‘urbanised sophistication’¹; such an urban focus of Catullus’ content is a key demarcation of Catullus’ and Horace’s thematic focuses, with Horace’s ability to universalise his themes.

In the light of Epicurus approach to friendship as being one of the most durable of earthly acquisitions, Horace and Catullus appear to be synonymous through their exploration of such a friendship theme, for example Catullus’ invitation to Fabullus (Poem 13) and one of Horace’s references to his friend Maecenas in Ode III 8, however the similarities are purely superficial. Upon close examination of Catullus’s treatment of such a theme, it is evident that Catullus writes on a truly personal level, at times with overtones of triviality such as Poem 12, to more superseding tones of reproach in poems such as 77 and 30, which accumulates to a final threat of divine retribution.

Horace incorporates the theme of friendship in a stylistically diverse way to Catullus’ treatment. In his address to Postumus (III14), Horace seamlessly incorporates his preoccupation with the philosophical approach of *carpe diem*. Horace explores this theme stylistically, even from the commencement of this ode, with the pathetic repetition of “Postume, Postume” evoking a melancholy tone, as well as his selection of such a name, referring to the Roman tradition of naming a son who was born after his fathers’ death as ‘Postumus’. This ode serves as Horace’s disputation against the futility of the battle of “pietas”, or religious scrupulosity, against age and death. “Eheu fugaces” is a vivid image throughout this ode as it is coupled with the hyperbolic and mocking references to mythological creatures, in particular the vanity in utilising extravagant sacrifices to ‘buy off’, in a sense, Pluto.

¹ Havelock, E. A. *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (1967) Russell and Russell, New York

Thematic concerns, particularly love, also play a pivotal role in differentiating the stylistic elements of Horace and Catullus' lyric verse. In Ode I 11, Horace incorporates Epicurean philosophy and values to justify life and love, through his viticultural metaphor escalating to the universality of the moral of his poem "carpe diem". Conversely Catullus' attention, as R. Lyne argues, is 'egocentric'.² Catullus appears to be hyperbolic in his presentation of his personal feelings of affection, most apparently in Poem 5 where he addresses Lesbia "da mi basia mille..."

On the contrary, Horace is more rational in his approach to both love and loss of love, particularly in his circumlocutory way of discussing the destructive nature of love. For example, the complexity of the stylistic construction of Ode I 5, such as the metaphor of a rough sea, enjambment from the first stanza to the second with the sudden "heu" evoking a discordant tone, reveals that this ode is a true demarcation of Horace's stylistic difference from Catullus. Horace conveys his message of the destructive nature of love through the complex structural formation of his ode, not just through the words themselves, through his composition of the ode as a reflection of his own experiences, yet depicting them as a warning to the "puer".

The seeming detachment of Horace from many of his odes also marks a distinction between the two lyric poets and their personal, poetic involvement in their verse. Ode I 25, for example, reveals Horace as adopting a distant position in his presentation of Lydia's romantic youth, only highlighting the transience of her life and serving as a reminder that 'even charming and talented beauties grow old...their attractions and desirability grow less.'³ Dissimilarly, Catullus engages himself in the relationship of other individuals, such as Acmen and Septimius (Poem 45). However, it would be incorrect to argue that Horace is personally disengaged from his odes, especially through exploring Ode I 13. In this ode Horace appears to express his strong internal feelings and reactions to Lydia's love of Telephus, however the concluding stanza completes an assessment of Horace's ability to stylistically extricate himself from poetic passion, through his strong use of hyperbaton "felices ter amplius quos inrupta tenet copula nec malis divolsus querimoniis suprema citius solvet amor die".

Michael Putnam argues 'if Catullus works by metonymy, Horace, by contrast, is a poet of metaphor and allegory... Catullus lives by the actual and the concrete, Horace more in terms of the abstract and symbolic.'⁴ Such an assessment is very fair when both lyric poets and their verses are studied critically and comparatively. It is evident that Horace and Catullus explore similar, general themes

² Lyne, R.O.A.M *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace* (1980) Oxford University Press, New York p. 227

³ Harrison, J.A. *Horace in his Odes* (1981) Bristol Classical Press, Eastbourne p. 68

⁴ Putnam, Michael C. J. *Poetic Interplay: Catullus and Horace* (2006) Princeton University Press, New Jersey p.8

such as love and friendship. The key demarcation between these two poets, however, is the means by which they explore such themes. Horace's ability to use complex rhetoric and an almost clear use of objectivity differentiates his poetic involvement and style from Catullus'. Catullus clearly personally engages himself with his lyric verse, often arriving at bitter conclusions and producing equally bitter accusations towards those who have wronged him.

Categorised within the limitations of the same literary genre, both poets explore their own literary parameters within such a confine; Catullus writes simplistically to produce personal scathing or amatory messages, where as Horace stylistically incorporates philosophy to provide his lyric verse with a universal teaching.

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