**Zeitschrift:** Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

**Band:** 79 (2022)

**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** Horace's second ode

**Autor:** Woodman, Anthony J.

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-981198

**Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.

**Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. Voir Informations légales.

**Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. See Legal notice.

**Download PDF:** 22.01.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch**

# Horace's second ode

*Anthony J. Woodman, Durham*

*Abstract:* This paper offers a new and comprehensive interpretation of Horace, *Odes* 1.2, with principal reference to its meaning, argument and dramatic context. The current view of the Tiber flood is rejected, the influence of Virgil's *Georgics* is reconsidered, and the relevance of Cicero's poem *Consulatus suus* is advocated. A new significance is attributed to the central lines of the poem, which, it is suggested, reflect the conspiracy of M. Aemilius Lepidus in 31/30 BC, an episode which scholars have hitherto dismissed as trivial or even non-existent.
*Keywords:* Horace, *Odes*, portents, Tiber, Virgil, Cicero, conspiracy, M. Lepidus.

*Iam satis terris niuis atque dirae*
*grandinis misit Pater et rubente*
*dextera sacras iaculatus arces*
4 *terruit urbem,*

*terruit gentis, graue ne rediret*
*saeculum Pyrrhae noua monstra questae,*
*omne cum Proteus pecus egit altos*
8 *uisere montis,*

*piscium et summa genus haesit ulmo,*
*nota quae sedes fuerat columbis,*
*et superiecto pauidae natarunt*
12 *aequore dammae.*

*uidimus flauum Tiberim retortis*
*litore Etrusco uiolenter undis*
*ire deiectum monumenta regis*
16 *templaque Vestae,*

*Iliae dum se nimium querenti*
*iactat ultorem, uagus et sinistra*
*labitur ripa Ioue non probante u-*
20 *xorius amnis.*

* For comments on various earlier drafts of this paper I am most grateful to the late E. Courtney, R.G. Mayer, J.F. Miller, and especially I.M.Le M. Du Quesnay and D.S. Levene; their agreement should not be assumed. I am also grateful for an opportunity to deliver an oral version in Cambridge (February 2019) and for the comments I received there.

*audiet ciues acuisse ferrum*
*quo graues Persae melius perirent,*
*audiet pugnas uitio parentum*
24 *rara iuuentus.*

*quem uocet diuum populus ruentis*
*imperi rebus? prece qua fatigent*
*uirgines sanctae minus audientem*
28 *carmina Vestam?*

*cui dabit partis scelus expiandi*
*Iuppiter? tandem uenias precamur,*
*nube candentes umeros amictus,*
32 *augur Apollo,*

*siue tu mauis, Erycina ridens,*
*quam Iocus circumuolat et Cupido,*
*siue neglectum genus et nepotes*
36 *respicis auctor,*

*heu nimis longo satiate ludo,*
*quem iuuat clamor galeaeque leues,*
*acer et Mauri peditis cruentum*[1]
40 *uultus in hostem;*

*siue mutata iuuenem figura*
*ales in terris imitaris almae*
*filius Maiae, patiens uocari*
44 *Caesaris ultor,*[2]

*serus in caelum redeas diuque*
*laetus intersis populo Quirini,*
*neue te nostris uitiis iniquum*
48 *ocior aura*

*tollat; hic magnos potius triumphos,*
*hic ames dici pater atque princeps,*
*neu sinas Medos equitare inultos*
52 *te duce, Caesar.*

1 The text of this line has often been subjected to emendation (see the *Repertory of Conjectures on Horace:* http://tekstlab.uio.no/horace/), of which the most popular is Faber's *Marsi* for the transmitted *Mauri.* By printing the paradosis (defended recently by F. Cairns, *Roman Lyric. Collected Papers on Catullus and Horace* (Berlin/Boston 2012) 244–251, and M.C. Sloan, "*Mauri* versus *Marsi* in Horace's Odes 1.2.39", *Illinois Classical Studies* 41 (2016) 41–57, I do not wish to imply that I agree with it.

2 This is the conventional punctuation; a colon is placed here by N. Rudd, *Horace: Odes and Epodes*, Loeb ed. (Cambridge, MA/London, 2004), as will be discussed below (VII).

The importance of Horace's second ode is clear both from its position in the collection and from the attention which it pays to the *princeps*, but scholars agree on little else beyond its importance.[3] In a standard handbook on Horace it has recently been described as "one of the finest poems he ever wrote",[4] yet R.G.M. Nisbet dismissed it as "conspicuously unattractive":[5] indeed criticism has been directed at some or all of it since antiquity, and almost half of it was deleted by Peerlkamp. Some scholars "persist in putting Julius Caesar at the centre of the poem", but Nisbet/Hubbard in the standard commentary argue against this persistence.[6] Some scholars think that "The keynote of the poem is plainly vengeance",[7] others think that the poem deprecates vengeance.[8] Some think that the opening portents are generic and describe "the experience of a generation",[9] others think that the portents can be dated to a specific year, proposing dates as widely separate as 54 BC and 27 BC.[10] What is to be made of a poem which has generated such diverse opi-

3 R.G.M. Nisbet once observed that "In several ancient collections the second poem is demonstrably early", and one of his examples was this ode ("Persius", in J.P. Sullivan (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Satire* (London 1965) 50); but no "demonstration" was forthcoming and Nisbet's pronouncement was probably based on his dislike of the ode (which does not feature in L.P. Wilkinson, "The Earliest Odes of Horace", *Hermes* 84 (1956) 495–499. Besides, early is not necessarily equivalent to unimportant (see e.g. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 242–243). On second poems see further B.W. Breed, "Some Second Poems: Theocritus, Virgil, Tibullus", in P.E. Knox et al. (eds.), *They Keep It All Hid: Augustan Poetry, Its Antecedents and Reception* (Berlin/Boston) 117–129.

4 H.-C. Günther, "The first collection of Odes", in id. (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Horace* (Leiden/Boston 2013) 238.

5 R.G.M. Nisbet, "*Romanae fidicen lyrae*: the *Odes* of Horace", in J.P. Sullivan (ed.), *Critical Essays on Roman Literature: Elegy and Lyric* (1962) 212. Compare e.g. L.P. Wilkinson, *Horace and his Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge 1945) 63; R.L.B. McNeill, *Horace: Image, Identity, and Audience* (Baltimore 2001) 114 "*Odes* 1.2 is thus unsuccessful ... [T]he ambiguity of Horace's self-ascribed position as commentator on the regime has undone his attempt to accommodate the multiple implications of celebrating Augustus' transcendent primacy in the Roman state". It is difficult to know what this means.

6 R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* (Oxford 1970) 17. [Henceforward "N/H".]

7 R. Mayer, *Horace: Odes Book I* (Cambridge 2012) 73.

8 S. Commager, "Horace, *Carmina*, I, 2", *American Journal of Philology* 80 (1959) 37–55.

9 P. Shorey, *Horace: Odes and Epodes* (Boston 1909) 145. So too e.g. Fraenkel, *op. cit.* (n. 3) 246; I. Becher, "Tiberüberschwemmungen: die Interpretation von Prodigien in Augusteischer Zeit", *Klio* 67 (1985) 475 n. 33.

10 For 54 BC (Dio 39.61.1) see e.g. W.A. Camps, "Critical and Exegetical Notes", *American Journal of Philology* 94 (1973) 140–142; for 16–17 January 27 BC (Dio 53.20.1) see e.g. C. Gallavotti, "Il secondo carme di Orazio", *La Parola del Passato* 4 (1949) 217–229: this latter date is adopted by many and accepted by G.O. Hutchinson in his discussion of the chronology of the *Odes* (*Talking Books. Readings in Hellenistic and Roman Books of Poetry* (Oxford 2008) 138), although Dio specifically says that the Tiber flood of that year was regarded as a *good* omen (53.20.1). The year 44 has been inferred from the ode itself (see e.g. G.S. Aldrete, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore 2007) 21–23, 242); the year 32 has been inferred from the destruction of the Pons Sublicius mentioned by Dio 50.8.3 (see E. Kraggerud, "Bad Weather in Horace, *Odes* I 2", *Symbolae Osloenses* 60 (1985) 95–119). There is no reference to the ode in the recent discussion by H. Price, "Flooding the Roman Forum", in I. Gildenhard et al. (eds.), *Augustus and the Destruction of History, Cambridge Classical Journal* Suppl. 41 (Cambridge 2019) 189–221.

nions?[11] In what follows, the poem will be discussed section by section (I, V, VII), with particular focus on matters of intertextuality (II–III), date (IV) and historical context (VI).

## I Portents (1–20)

In the first stanza Jupiter, called simply *Pater*, has sent down snow, hail and lightning. Since snow and especially lightning were regarded as portents, it is almost certain that these phenomena are being seen as portents;[12] it is true that the evidence for hail as a portent is somewhat ambiguous,[13] but its description as *dirae*, an adjective almost technical of portents,[14] puts it beyond doubt that it is being regarded as a portent here.[15] These three portents, each described more expansively than the last, have caused terror in Rome and abroad (4–5): everyone was afraid that there would be a return of the *saeculum* of Pyrrha (5–6), when, as Ovid recounted at the start of the *Metamorphoses*, the world was brought to an end in a cataclysm on account of human wrongdoing, *noxa* (Ov. *Met.* 1.214). Pyrrha herself is described by Horace in the phrase *noua monstra questae* (6). It seems to be generally believed that *questae* is a so-called "aoristic" or timeless participle and that the *noua monstra* are illustrated and elaborated by the phenomena in the *cum*-clause in lines 7–12: thus in David West's translation ("The cruel age of Pyrrha seemed to be returning, when she bewailed strange sights and Proteus drove his herds to visit the high mountains …") or in the Loeb translation of Niall Rudd: "for fear the disastrous age of Pyrrha should return, who cried aghast at unheard-of marvels, when Proteus drove all his seals to visit the high mountains …".[16] But Francis Cairns, in one of his masterly contributions to the study of Horace's *Odes*, objected that the phenomena described in lines 7–12 are not *monstra* at all but *adynata*.[17] He therefore argued that *questae* is to be understood as a genuinely past participle and that *monstra* is to be taken in its technical sense of "prodigies"

11 For other discussions see e.g. T. Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz* (Helsinki 1973) 85–92; H.P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz* (3rd edn, Darmstadt 2001) 1.38–58 (1st ed. 1972); J.F. Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge 2009) 46–53; J.S. Clay, "Horace et le frère cadet d'Apollon", in B. Delignon, N. Le Meur and O. Thévenaz (eds.), *La poésie lyrique dans la cité antique: Les Odes d'Horace au miroir de la lyrique grecque archaïque* (Paris 2016) 285–293; M.C. Sloan, "Lyrical Illusions: the Two-faced Message of *Odes* 1.2", *Classical Philology* 114 (2019) 446–464.

12 See F. Cairns, "Horace, *Odes* 1.2", *Eranos* 69 (1971) 70–72 = *op. cit.* (n. 1) 167–169, who says that this is contrary to orthodox opinion.

13 See Cic. *ND* 2.14; Cairns, *op. cit.* (n. 12) 71 = *op. cit.* (n. 1) 168.

14 *OLD* 1, *TLL* 5.1.1268.67 ff.

15 This is denied by Fraenkel, seemingly on the strange grounds that at 2.2.13 *dirus* is used to describe dropsy (*op. cit.* (n. 3) 246 n. 2). Numerous commentators, e.g. most recently Mayer, note that *dirae* is to be taken *apo koinou* with *niuis*. For *dirae grandinis* cf. Germ. 81, 115.

16 D. West, *Horace: Odes I. Carpe Diem* (Oxford 1995) 9; Rudd, *op. cit.* (n. 2).

17 Cairns, *op. cit.* (n. 12) 78–79 = *op. cit.* (n. 1) 173–174 (although *noua* at *Epo.* 16.30 agrees with *libidine*, not *monstra*).

or "portents": "lest the age of Pyrrha, who had ... bewailed portents strange to her, should return, the age when Proteus drove his entire herd to visit the high mountains ...".[18] In defence of this interpretation Cairns pointed out that the *cum*-clause, "instead of hanging in mid-air as hitherto, now depends upon and enlarges upon *saeculum*" (and for *saeculum* expanded by a *cum*-clause cf. Cic. *Rep.* 2.18). If this interpretation is correct, as I believe it is,[19] Horace is describing a two-stage process in which portents are followed by a cataclysm, a process which, as we shall see, appears to be exactly mirrored in his own day.

Horace's lengthy description of the cataclysm in terms of adynata (7–12) drew the criticism of Porphyrio in antiquity: "his references to fish and doves are trivialising in so grim a context, except for the fact that these elaborations are permitted to lyric poets" (*leuiter in re tam atroci et piscium et palumborum meminit, nisi quod hi excessus lyricis concessi sunt*).[20] The third stanza was in fact deleted entirely by Guyet, Peerlkamp and Meineke; and Porphyrio's criticism is echoed by Nisbet/Hubbard: "such descriptions are a frivolous way of describing chaos, and do not suit a political poem".[21] But no such criticism is forthcoming in the first ode of Book 3, a political poem if ever there was one, when the fish observe their domain being taken over by the property developer (3.1.33–34): Nisbet/Rudd *ad loc.* merely refer to "a bizarre invasion" and cross-refer to our ode without further comment.[22] Besides, the criticism directed at our ode does not take account of the context in which the description occurs. Horace is not speaking in his own person, as it were, but is giving voice to his terrified contemporaries: it was people in general – those indicated by *urbem* and *gentes* in lines 4–5 – who feared that the world was coming to an end, and it was quite natural that they should view the prospect in terms of impossibilities.[23]

The fourth portent, deliberately separated from the first three by the account of Pyrrha's *saeculum*, has an extra dimension. The flooding of the Tiber was com-

18 See *OLD monstrum* 1 (cf. 2). *monstra* is translated as "portents" by R.O.A.M. Lyne (*Horace: Behind the Public Poetry* (New Haven/London 1995) 44), but without any reference to Cairns.

19 Since deer can in fact swim, lines 11–12 do not strictly belong with the *adynata* of lines 7–10 at all (although Horace may have believed that deer are incapable of swimming). In some cases it is hard to distinguish between portents and *adynata*, since some phenomena which are described as portents by Livy – such as the stair-climbing ox (21.62.3) or the goats growing sheep's wool (22.1.13) – seem to resemble *adynata* very closely.

20 Although *excessus* is often translated as "excesses" here, the word's usual meaning in a rhetorical context is "digression", which is how it is translated by Mayer, *op. cit.* (n. 7) 64. In *TLL* our passage is listed under the rare title *de usu digressionis* (5.2.1229.15–18).

21 N/H on line 9.

22 R.G.M. Nisbet and N. Rudd, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book III* (Oxford 2004) 16.

23 T. Obbarius on line 9 quotes Dio 45.17.7 on 43 BC: ἰχθῦς ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἀμύθητοι κατὰ τὰς τοῦ Τιβέριδος ἐκβολὰς ἐς τὴν ἤπειρον ἐξέπεσον (*Q. Horati Flacci Carmina* (Jena 1848) 8). E.C. Wickham's note on *questae* implies that Horace's description is focalised by Pyrrha (*Q. Horati Flacci Opera Omnia* (Oxford 1896) Vol.1, 39); West on 11–12 talks of focalisation by the frightened deer (*op. cit.* (n. 16) 11): neither of these observations is incompatible with the point made above.

monly regarded as a portent, but in an ablative absolute (13–14) Horace adds a description of how the flooding occurred: *retortis | litore Etrusco uiolenter undis.* Porphyrio explains that *litus Etruscum* designates the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea at the mouth of the Tiber,[24] but Mayer in his recent commentary states that "nowadays the river-bank at the foot of the Janiculan Hill is preferred". In fact this preference is held, or at least mentioned, by various older commentators, as well as by Kiessling/Heinze and especially by Nisbet/Hubbard, who dismiss Porphyrio's explanation and claim instead that *litus Etruscum* refers to the west bank of the Tiber itself: "Just beyond the Isola Tiberina the river, which has been flowing to the south-east, changes its course to the south-west; about this point the flood flowed north-east to the Forum. Horace pictures the water as deflected by the salient on the west bank."[25] There are three objections to this interpretation, two minor and one major. The first is that *litus* normally designates the sea-shore, not a river-bank; but, since there are parallels for the meaning "river-bank", including (in Virgil) the bank of the Tiber (*Aen.* 8.83),[26] this objection is not decisive. The second objection is that, if *litore Etrusco* refers to the west or right bank, *retortis* implies that the river was deflected by that bank onto the east or left bank, thus pre-empting, and detracting from, the expressed reference to the plight of the left bank in lines 18–19 (*sinistra … ripa*). According to Orelli, *retortis* shows that *litus Etruscum* simply cannot mean the right bank ("*retortis* vetat de Tiberis ripa dextra explicare"), although it is not clear what he sees as the problem.[27] But it is the third objection which is fatal. There are four other occurrences of the phrase *litus Etruscum* in Latin: two of them are in Horace himself (*Epod.* 16.40, *CS* 38), the other two in the geographical writer Pomponius Mela (2.122 *duae grandes fretoque diuisae, quarum Corsica Etrusco litori propior*[28]) and the late poet Claudian (*Rapt. Proserp.* 3.445–446); on each occasion the phrase refers to the coast-line of the Tyrrhenian Sea. It is quite impossible that this ode should be the one place where the phrase has a completely different meaning.

It follows that Horace is describing a phenomenon resembling the bore which travels up the River Severn in England or up the Savannah River in the Uni-

24 Porphyrio on line 14: *Constat uiolentia maris repulsum Tiberim redundare solitum ‹et› effundi super ripas suas, quod hic nunc monstrose factum dicit … Litus autem Etruscum Tyrrheni (id est Tusci) maris litus accipe, in quod Tiberis exit.*

25 N/H on line 14; cf. A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Horaz: Oden und Epoden* (11th edn, Zurich/Berlin 1964) 13. This view has possibly been influenced by the appearance of the expression *Tuscum Tiberim* at Virg. *G.* 1.499 (see further II below).

26 See *OLD* 1c, *TLL* 7.2.1540.9 ff.

27 J.G. Orelli, *Q. Horatius Flaccus*, Vol. 1 (3rd edn, Zurich 1850) *ad loc.* For brief remarks on the phrase *sinistra | … ripa* see N. Horsfall, "Illusion and Reality in Latin Topographical Writing", *Greece & Rome* 32 (1985) 204 = *Fifty Years at the Sibyl's Heels* (Oxford 2020) 189.

28 This is the text in the edition of Ranstrand (1971); the words *Corsica Etrusco* were deleted by Frick (1880).

ted States.[29] Now it is true that bores are tidal, regular and frequent, whereas the phenomenon in the ode is unusual and portentous and cannot be tidal, since the Mediterranean is a tideless sea. Yet the ancients believed that river floods were often caused by winds blowing at the river-mouth,[30] and according to Dio the flood of the Tiber in 54 BC may have been caused by just such a wind driving the water upstream (39.61.6). In other words, as Le Gall in his book on the Tiber says, it was perfectly possible for people to believe that they saw the waters of the Tiber driven backwards: *retortis* | ... *uiolenter undis.*[31] As we know from a later ode, the backwards flow of the Tiber was regarded as an *adynaton*: if Horace's friend Iccius is going to exchange his philosophical texts for military campaigning, "who would say that streams could not flow backwards up steep mountain-sides or the Tiber go into reverse?" (1.29.10–12 *quis neget arduis* | *pronos relabi posse riuos* | *montibus et Tiberim reuerti ...?*). The description of the Tiber flowing backwards indicates that the phenomenon takes on the character of an *adynaton*, parallel to those listed in lines 7–12. The flooding river is not simply a portent but seems to contemporaries to be the beginning of the cataclysm which that portent portends. No wonder they were terrified as they stood and watched the rising waters.[32]

The notion that the flooding Tiber is the incipient cataclysm as well as a portent is encouraged by the myth of Ilia in the fifth stanza (lines 17–20). Ilia is the Vestal Virgin who was raped by Mars and thrown into the river, thus becoming the Tiber's wife.[33] Why is she described as "complaining" (*querenti*) in line 17? According to Gow she is "complaining of the murder of Julius Caesar", and many older commentators agree: "she complains of the murder of her great descendant", says Wickham.[34] Since there has not been even the slightest hint of Julius Caesar hitherto, this explanation is almost incomprehensible, and Nisbet/Hubbard were quite right to propose an alternative: the reason for Ilia's complaint, they say, "can only be 'because she was thrown into the river'." Yet this explanation too is unsatisfactory because trivialising; it prompts pedantic

29 The possibility that he is describing instead a tsunami seems unlikely, since such descriptions in Thucydides (3.89: 426 BC) and Ammianus (26.10.15–19: AD 365) are significantly different: for the former see Hornblower *ad loc.*; for the latter see G. Kelly, "Ammianus and the Great Tsunami", *Journal of Roman Studies* 94 (2004) 141–167.

30 See e.g. N/H on line 14. In late August 2020 Hurricane Laura was reported as having driven the Mississippi to flow backwards.

31 So J. Le Gall, *Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1953) 133–134.

32 Cairns believes that "the flood of the Tiber is the beginning of the world-flood which the *gentes* and the *urbs* are afraid of" (*op. cit.* (n. 12) 79–80 = *op. cit.* (n. 1) 174), but he does not discuss *retortis* ... *undis* in this connection.

33 For various versions of the story see H.D. Jocelyn, "Ennius and the Impregnation of Ilia", *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia* (Perugia): 1. Studi Classici 27 [n.s. 13] (1989–1990) 21–46.

34 J. Gow, *Q. Horati Flacci Carmina; Liber Epodon* (Cambridge 1896) *ad loc.*; Wickham, *op. cit.* (n. 23) *ad loc.*

thoughts of whether or not Ilia could swim.[35] Ilia is complaining because she was raped (in elegy the verb is used of wronged women: cf. Ov. *Her.* 17.12, 20.24), and the rape was made worse by the fact that she was a Vestal Virgin. The sexual intercourse of a Vestal Virgin could itself be regarded as a *prodigium.*[36] Livy under 216 BC writes that, "in addition to such great disasters, people were terrified as well not only by other *prodigia* but also because two Vestals that year … were found guilty of unlawful intercourse" (22.57.2 *territi etiam super tantas clades cum ceteris prodigiis tum quod duae Vestales eo anno … stupri compertae*; cf. Dio 26.87.1–2 under 114 BC). Ilia regards herself the victim of what could be seen as a *prodigium*, and, since *queror* can be used of a complainant at law (*OLD* 1e), she is seeking redress; her husband, the *uxorius amnis* of lines 19–20, responds by trying to comfort her through avenging the wrong which they both believe she has suffered. The river and his wife see the episode almost in domestic terms, and his natural target is the temple of Vesta (16), since it was Vesta who failed to protect her priestess from Mars' lust. But their perspective on the episode is mistaken, since they fail to take account of the fact that the offspring of the rape was Romulus, the fated founder of Rome, which explains why Jupiter disapproves.[37]

## II Virgil

Scholars are almost unanimous in seeing the ode, and in particular the list of portents, as alluding to Book 1 of Virgil's *Georgics*, and in particular to Virgil's list of portents at the end of that book. Virgil's portents portend the civil wars of the 40s and 30s BC, and scholars since Porphyrio have made the assumption that Horace's portents connote those same wars, an assumption which they see confirmed by the reference in the sixth stanza (21) to citizens sharpening their swords *contra cives*, as Jani remarks.[38] How clear is the evidence on which this double hypothesis is based? Since Fraenkel is probably the most influential scholar to discuss the relationship between Horace's ode and Virgil's *Georgics*, we may take his account as representative.[39]

35 See also R.J. Clark, "Ilia's Excessive Complaint and the Flood in Horace, *Odes* 1.2", *Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010) 262–267, esp. 265. Clark understands *nimium* as qualifying *querenti* rather than *ultorem*, a question on which the commentators are divided.

36 The evidence is complicated and controversial: see e.g. H.N. Parker, "Why Were the Vestals Virgins? Or the Chastity of Women and the Safety of the Roman State", *American Journal of Philology* 125 (2004) 563–601.

37 On *Ioue non probante* Shorey (n. 9) *ad loc.* quotes ὑπὲρ Διὸς αἶσαν (Hom. *Il.* 17.321, Ap. Rhod. 4.1254).

38 C.D. Jani, *Q. Horatii Flacci Opera*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig 1778) *ad loc.*

39 Fraenkel, *op. cit.* (n. 3) 243–246. See also e.g. C. Facchini Tosi, "Virgilio 1: Loci similes in Orazio e Virgilio", in *Orazio: Enciclopedia oraziana* (Rome 1996) 1.939.

"It seems very probable", says Fraenkel, that Horace's reference to lightning in lines 2–3, *Pater et rubente* | *dextera* ..., was "stimulated" by Virgil's description of a storm in lines 328–329 of the first *Georgic:*

> *ipse* pater *media nimborum in nocte* corusca
> *fulmina molitur* dextra.

The cogency of this alleged allusion depends upon the case and gender of *corusca:* Fraenkel – like Conington, Mynors and Erren in their commentaries on the *Georgics* – takes it to be ablative and feminine, agreeing with *dextra,* but Servius unhesitatingly took it as accusative and neuter, agreeing with *fulmina.* R.D. Williams agreed with Servius, and quoted Lucretius (5.295–296) in support.[40] It seems almost certain that Servius and Williams are correct. There are very many places in Virgil where *dextra* is used in the sense "with the right hand", but, apart from a single exception at *Aeneid* 11.556 *dextra ingenti,* the noun is accompanied by a descriptive adjective in none of them. The evidence thus seems overwhelmingly in favour of taking *corusca,* used by Horace himself of lightning in a later ode (1.34.6), with *fulmina.*

The other proposed allusions derive from the very end of the first Georgic, which are here set out at length so that their full extent may be seen (466–511):

*ille etiam exstincto miseratus* ***Caesare*** *Romam,*
*cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine texit*
*impiaque aeternam* *timuerunt* ***saecula*** *noctem.*
*Tempore quamquam illo tellus quoque et aequora ponti,*
470 *obscenaeque canes importunaeque uolucres*
*signa dabant. Quotiens Cyclopum efferuere in agros*
***uidimus*** *undantem ruptis fornacibus Aetnam,*
*flammarumque globos liquefactaque uoluere saxa!*
*Armorum sonitum toto Germania caelo*
475 ***audiit****, insolitis tremuerunt motibus Alpes.*
*Vox quoque per lucos uulgo exaudita silentis*
*ingens, et simulacra modis pallentia miris*
*uisa sub obscurum noctis, pecudesque locutae*
*(infandum!); sistunt amnes terraeque dehiscunt,*
480 *et maestum inlacrimat* ***templis*** *ebur aeraque sudant.*
*Proluit insano con****torquens*** *uertice siluas*
*fluuiorum rex Eridanus camposque per omnis*
*cum stabulis armenta tulit. Nec tempore eodem*
*tristibus aut extis fibrae apparere minaces*
485 *aut puteis manare cruor cessauit, et altae*
*per noctem resonare lupis ululantibus urbes.*
*Non alias caelo ceciderunt plura sereno*

40 R.F. Thomas in his commentary makes no comment.

*fulgura nec* ***diri*** *totiens arsere cometae.*
*Ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis*
490 *Romanas acies iterum uidere Philippi;*
*nec fuit indignum superis bis sanguine nostro*
*Emathiam et latos Haemi pinguescere campos.*
*Scilicet et tempus ueniet cum finibus illis*
*agricola incuruo terram molitus aratro*
495 *exesa inueniet scabra robigine pila,*
*aut grauibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanis*
*grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris.*
*Di patrii Indigetes et Romule* ***Vesta****que mater,*
*quae Tuscum* ***Tiberim*** *et Romana Palatia seruas,*
500 *hunc saltem euerso* ***iuuenem*** *succurrere saeclo*
*ne prohibete.* ***Satis iam*** *pridem sanguine nostro*
*Laomedonteae luimus periuria Troiae;*
*iam pridem nobis* ***caeli*** *te regia,* ***Caesar,***
*inuidet atque hominum* ***queritur*** *curare* ***triumphos,***
505 *quippe ubi fas uersum atque nefas: tot bella per orbem,*
*tam multae scelerum facies, non ullus aratro*
*dignus honos, squalent abductis arua colonis,*
*et curuae rigidum falces conflantur in ensem.*
*hinc mouet Euphrates, illinc Germania bellum;*
510 *uicinae ruptis inter se legibus urbes*
*arma ferunt; saeuit toto Mars impius orbe, …*

There is clearly an overlap of wording between this passage and Horace's ode, but how many of the identical or synonymous words are significant? Horace's reference to witnessing the Tiber flood (13 *uidimus*) is said to derive from Virgil's description of an eruption of Etna (472 *uidimus*), but a difficulty is that *uidere* is commonly used in almost every reference to autopsy, especially those where unpleasant or portentous events are concerned.[41] Horace's description of Octavian as a young man (41 *iuuenem*) and the two words with which he begins the ode, *Iam satis*, are said to derive from the prayer with which Virgil ends his book in lines 498–502. It is true that Octavian is referred to as *iuuenem* on both occasions, but so he is too in the first *Eclogue* (line 42) and in Horace's *Satires* (2.5.62): it seems to have been a standard way of referring to Octavian.[42] Fraenkel discusses the phrases *satis iam* and *iam satis* at some length but, like other scholars who draw attention to this similarity, evidently ignores the fact that *iam* in the *Georgics* goes not so much with *satis* as with *pridem*, as is clear from the repetition of *iam pridem* in line 503. *iam pridem* means 'for a long time now' (*OLD pridem* 4). Our conclusion must be that, if each example is examined linguistically, the alleged

41 See e.g. N/H on 13.
42 See I.M.Le M. Du Quesnay, "Vergil's First Eclogue", *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3 (1981) 133.

allusion requires some qualification. Of course it may be argued that the allusions should be viewed collectively and are confirmed by the fact that in each poem there is a similar sequence of ideas: portents-civil war-saviour. Yet Virgil does not mention snow or hail or the Tiber as portents (although this last appears at 499 in the prayer). His long list of strange phenomena includes such items as mysterious voices (476), speaking animals (478) and sweating statues (480), and he records manifestations from as far away as Sicily, Germany and the Alps (471–475). Horace's portents are far less spectacular and far more domestic. In short, although Virgilian influence on the ode may be hard to deny, it seems unsafe to conclude that Horace is necessarily referring to the same set of events.

## III Cicero

It is no accident that Horace chose the term *saeculum* to refer to the cataclysm of Pyrrha. The first half of the first century BC was punctuated by a succession of portents which, as Weinstock has observed, were each interpreted as indicating a *saeculum*:[43]

> A great number of portents were recorded in 88 BC ... The Senate consulted the *haruspices*, who explained that those portents announced the beginning of a new *saeculum* and with it the Civil War. In 65 frightening portents occurred again, and the *haruspices* declared that this time the portents indicated not just the end of a *saeculum* but the end of Rome altogether unless the gods intervened. Divine intervention meant the appearance of an exceptional man.

When further portents occurred in 63 BC, the year which saw the conspiracy of Catiline, Cicero as consul naturally portrayed himself as the exceptional man whom the crisis required. He described the portents of 65 and 63 BC in his poem *Consulatus suus*, of which a substantial fragment (fr. 10 in Courtney's edition) is quoted in the *De diuinatione* (1.17–22).

In Cicero's poem, the Father targeted his own temple on the Capitoline in 65 BC (36–38):[44]

> ***Pater** altitonans stellanti nixus Olympo*
> *ipse suos quondam tumulos ac **templa** petiuit*
> *et Capitolinis iniecit sedibus ignis;*

43 S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971) 192.

44 The portents of 65 BC and 63 BC are presented by Cicero in reverse chronological order; the goddess Urania is speaking throughout. For this and other matters see H.D. Jocelyn, "Urania's Discourse in Cicero's Poem On His Consulship: Some Problems", *Ciceroniana* 5 (1984) 39–54.

and the Etruscan soothsayers warned of disaster for the race and feared terrible destruction (50–53):

> *uoluier in* ***gentem*** *cladem pestemque monebant, ...*
> ***templa*** *deumque adeo flammis* ***urbem****que iubebant*
> *eripere et stragem horribilem caedemque uereri.*

Two years later Cicero witnessed further portents when, as the year's new consul, he was celebrating the Feriae Latinae on the Alban Mount, which was piled high with winter snow (13–15):

> *tu*[45] *quoque, cum tumulos Albano in monte niualis*
> *lustrasti et laeto mactasti lacte Latinas,*
> ***uidisti*** *et claro tremulos ardore cometas ...*

It is noticeable that Horace's ode has numerous verbal and thematic similarities with Cicero's poem; and it may be significant that, shortly after Cicero quotes the lines from *Consulatus suus* in the *De diuinatione*, he quotes Ennius' account of Ilia (1.40–41 = *Ann.* 34–50), to whom Horace had referred in lines 17–20. Whether the *De diuinatione* was in Horace's mind when he conceived his ode is perhaps impossible to say,[46] but the notion of Ciceronian influence has one particular item of evidence in its favour. After his leading role in suppressing the Catilinarian conspiracy, Cicero was hailed as "father of the fatherland" (*parens patriae:* cf. Cic. *Pis.* 6, *Sest.* 121).[47] This was not only a great honour in itself but Cicero was the first ever Roman to be a recipient of the title, or so we are told by the elder Pliny (*NH* 7.117). It is inconceivable that Cicero did not celebrate the honour in his epic poem, and the likelihood that he did so is strongly supported by its most famous surviving line (fr. 8 Courtney *o fortunatam natam me consule Romam*), where the metaphor of birth invites the complementary metaphor of parenthood. Horace was naturally familiar with Cicero's line, which he was later to echo and apply to Augustus (*Epist.* 2.1.256 *et formidatam Parthis te principe Romam*);[48] but it is surely also significant that at the end of the ode he refers to Octavian's being called "father" as well as *princeps* (50). Whatever we think of Horace's allusions to the *Georgics*, it is plausible to conclude that he was also alluding to Cicero's epic.

---

45 Addressed to Cicero.

46 For this type of "associated reminiscence" see A.B. Cook, "Associated Reminiscences", *Classical Review* 15 (1901) 338–345.

47 See further Weinstock, *op. cit.* (n. 43) 202.

48 See M. Lowrie, "Horace, Cicero and Augustus, or The Poet Statesman at *Epistles* 2.1.256", in A.J. Woodman and D. Feeney (eds), *Traditions and Contexts in the Poetry of Horace* (Cambridge 2002) 158–171.

## IV Dates

Horace's collocation of the titles *pater* and *princeps* raises the question of the ode's date: the former was not given officially to Augustus until 2 BC (*RG* 35.1), while the latter is first used of him in this very ode. Syndikus and other recent scholars are agreed that the ode was written after the battle of Actium in 31 BC: "Durch die letzte Strophe steht fest", he writes, "dass das Gedicht nach Aktium geschrieben ist."[49] Such statements are explained partly by the reference to "great triumphs" (49), which is seen as an allusion to Octavian's triple triumph in mid-August 29 BC,[50] but principally by the reference to fighting the Parthians (51), which can only be relevant after the defeat of Mark Antony, in whose *prouincia* Parthia had been. Now the date of an ode's composition is not necessarily identical with its dramatic date, and some scholars, influenced both by Horace's list of portents and by the similarities to Virgil's *Georgics*, have directed their attention to the period before Actium.[51] But considerable problems arise if we wish the pre-Actian period to be the dramatic context of Horace's final stanza: was Horace really prepared in 23 BC, when the ode was published, to portray himself to his readers as having had the power in (say) the mid-thirties to predict what in fact took place in and after 31 BC? Perhaps readers would not have been surprised if Horace had been confident of Octavian's victory over Antony (49); but they would surely have been taken aback by the notion that in Horace's opinion Octavian, if he had managed to defeat Antony, would revive the plans of his adoptive father for a retributive campaign against Parthia (51–52).[52] And it would have defied belief that Horace during the dying days of the Triumvirate had guessed the very title of *princeps* by which Octavian after Actium would be known for the rest of his life and which gave its name to the period during which he ruled. When Horace in other odes prays that Apollo will avert various disasters *a populo et principe Caesare* (1.21.14) or envisages the leader being called *pater* on the plinths of statues (3.24.27–28), no

49 Syndikus, *op. cit.* (n. 11) 1.38; N/H 17; West, *op. cit.* (n. 16) 12; Günther, *op. cit.* (n. 4) 236 n. 104.

50 On this interpretation, the words *magnos ... triumphos ... ames* (49–50) must presumably be taken to mean "may you enjoy [i.e. make the most of] your great triumphs" (*OLD amo* 9). The words might also mean "may you enjoy [i.e. celebrate] great triumphs" (sc. in the future), in which case they do not refer to August 29.

51 Lyne, *op. cit.* (n. 18) 48 n. 24 suggests that a mistranslation of lines 21–24 misled Syndikus (first edition, 1972) into placing the dramatic date of the ode before Actium. Though Syndikus subsequently amended his translation (third edition, 2001), he did not change his view on the dramatic date (*op. cit.* (n. 11) 1.41) and is followed by Günther, *op. cit.* (n. 4) 236–237.

52 For Augustus and Parthia see R. Seager, "*Neu sinas Medos equitare inultos:* Horace, the Parthians and Augustan Foreign Policy", *Athenaeum* 58 (1980) 103–118; J.G.F. Powell, "Horace, Scythia, and the East", *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 14 (2010) 137–190; J. Nabel, "Horace and the Tiridates Episode", *Rheinisches Museum* 158 (2015) 304–325, with an extensive bibliography. For Caesar's planned Parthian campaign see e.g. Pelling on Plut. *Caes.* 60.2.

one thinks that these odes are set before rather than after Actium.[53] Lyne assumes that the dramatic date of our ode is post-Actium – "What", he says, "would make a reader in the twenties think otherwise?" – and he is surely right. The assembly of motifs in lines 49–52 is authentically "Augustan"; indeed the only missing element is the name Augustus itself.

The absence of the name Augustus is suggestive, especially since we are presented with the other titles of *pater*, *princeps* and *dux*.[54] The name was given to Octavian on 16 January 27 BC, but only after an earlier proposal, that he be called Romulus, was mooted and then abandoned (Suet. *Aug.* 7.2, Dio 53.16.6–7).[55] It therefore seems significant that in lines 47–49a Horace's wish for Octavian/Mercury is *ne … te … ocior aura tollat.* The language, appropriate for a god who travelled at the speed of wind (Hom. *Od.* 5.45–46), has reminded scholars of the fate of Romulus, whose departure from the earth was allegedly effected by a wind (Liv. 1.16.2) and whom readers have had brought to their attention by the phrase *populo Quirini*, which Horace seems to have invented, in line 44: Quirinus is the alternative name for Romulus in his divinised form.[56] It is obviously possible to argue that Horace's ode reflects more precisely the period when Octavian was being seen as a second Romulus and before the name Augustus was officially chosen. Be that as it may, the ode's post-Actian dramatic date has important implications, as we shall see.

## V The Central Lines (21–30a)

The transition from the list of portents to the next section of the ode has caused trouble.[57] Porphyrio refers to the transition in line 21 as "asyndetic", and according to Nisbet/Hubbard "the drift equally perplexes modern editors". Mayer in his

53 Nisbet and Rudd (*op. cit.* (n. 22) 97–98) associate the date of 3.24 with that of 3.6, which they place in 28. (It should be noted that the precise titulature at 3.24.27–28 is controversial: see A.J. Woodman, *Horace: Odes Book III* (Cambridge 2022) 313–314). The earliest "official" example of the title *pater* that survives dates from 19/18 BC (Cooley on *RG* 35.1, Wardle on Suet. *Aug.* 58.1, Swan on Dio 55.10.10; Weinstock, *op. cit.* (n. 43) 203–204). For the two titles together, as in our ode, cf. Manil. 1.7 *Caesar, patriae princepsque paterque* (also of Augustus).

54 For *dux* see I.M. Le M. Du Quesnay, "Horace, *Odes* 4.5", in S.J. Harrison (ed.), *Homage to Horace* (Oxford 1995) 156.

55 See Wardle and Rich *ad loc.* in their respective commentaries. The name Augustus first appears in the *Odes* in Book 2 (9.19), then at 3.3.11 and 3.5.3 (Hutchinson, *op. cit.* (n. 10) 137).

56 See e.g. Myers on Ov. *Met.* 14.805–828. Only Ovid picked up *populo Quirini* (*Fast.* 1.69, *Met.* 15.572, 757); *Romuli gentem* had been written by Porcius Licinus (1.2) and Catullus (34.22–24), the former not mentioned by R.O.A.M. Lyne in his support of D.P. Fowler's proposal to change the latter to *Romulam … gentem* (*Collected Papers on Latin Poetry* (Oxford 2007) 287–288).

57 Scholars disagree on the structure of the ode. For example, N.E. Collinge (*The Structure of Horace's Odes* (London 1961) 103) classifies the poem as "responsive" and sees it consisting of two sets of six stanzas (1–24 ~ 29–52), each set divided into "strophe" (1–12, 29–40) and "antistrophe" (13–24, 41–52) and separated from each other by a pivotal stanza (25–28); the result is certainly very

recent commentary describes the transition as "abrupt"; Rudd in the Loeb edition follows his predecessor Bennett in printing his translation of the sixth stanza as a stand-alone paragraph, as if it were unconnected not only with the preceding lines but also with the following. Surely there is more to be said.

Portents require interpretation, and the populace has interpreted the three portents of lines 1–20 as portending a cataclysm, evidence of which they see in the flooding of the Tiber. But Horace, regarding the flood as nothing more than a fourth portent, has a different interpretation, which he expresses with a curious indirectness. The subject of the sixth stanza is a generation depleted through the wickedness of their parents (23–24 *uitio parentum* | *rara iuuentus*): such a description, as Cairns has pointed out,[58] is very appropriate for the descendants of the survivors of a *saeculum Pyrrhae*, the *uitium* of their parents being equivalent to *noxa* in Ovid's account of the cataclysm (above, Section I). But, says Horace, what this future generation will hear about is not a cataclysm but civil war, and the paucity of their numbers will be accounted for by their parents' internecine strife, which is what the *uitium* really refers to. In other words, the asyndeton of line 21 is adversative, as often, and the function of the sixth stanza as a whole is to correct the interpretation implied in the first five. The correction is emphasised by the complementary pairs of repeated verbs (4–5 *terruit* ... *terruit* ~ 21–23 *audiet* ... *audiet*): Horace's contemporaries have been terrified into a false belief about the future, but a future generation will hear reports of what actually happened in the past.

We shall need to return to the sixth stanza in a moment, but first we must consider the opening of the seventh, which is translated by David West as follows: "What god can the people call upon to shore up | their crumbling empire?" Rudd in the Loeb translation has an almost identical version: "What divinity are the people to call upon to restore the fortunes of their crumbling power?" Mayer refers to "the fortunes of their tottering power".[59] But references to the Romans' "crumbling empire" or "crumbling" or "tottering power" give quite the wrong impression when, after the defeat of Mark Antony, the eastern half of the empire had just been united with the vast territories which Octavian already possessed in the west. It seems to me more likely that the troublesome phrase *ruentis imperi*

neat, but it is difficult to divorce the question in 29–30a from those in 25–28 (see M. Marcovich, "Eight Horatian 'Bridges'", *Illinois Classical Studies* 5 (1980) 74–76). Mayer agrees with Collinge to the extent that he sees 1–24 as a unity (*op. cit.* (n. 7) 73); but it is difficult not to see 21–24 as cohering rather with 25–28 and hence that there should be a break between 20 and 21. The contortions of Günther result in incomprehensibility (*op. cit.* (n. 4) 232–235).

58 Cairns, *op. cit.* (n. 12) 80–81 = *op. cit.* (n. 1) 175–176.

59 Both West and Rudd (*op. cit.* (n. 2)), unlike N/H and Mayer, understand *diuum* to be accus. singular rather than genit. plural. According to Weinstock, it was Julius Caesar who created a real and lasting distinction between the terms *diuus* and *deus:* "'Divus' was from now on a god who had previously been a man" (*op. cit.* (n. 43) 391–392, quoting Serv. *Aen.* 5.45). If this is right, *quem* ... *diuum* as accus. singular is obviously relevant to the final three stanzas of the ode.

*rebus* is an example of enallage and is equivalent to *ruentibus imperi rebus:* "which of the gods is the people to summon when affairs of the empire are in crisis?" or perhaps "when the affairs of empire are in crisis". According to the poet, the present situation is critical, but the crisis has not yet reached the point at which divine rescue becomes impossible – and of course the remainder of the ode from now on is devoted exclusively to the nature of that divine rescue.

What, then, is the crisis to which reference is made with the words *ruentis imperi rebus?* It seems inescapable that this crisis is the same as that which is described in the preceding stanza (lines 21–24); and, if the crisis of lines 25–26 is set in the here-and-now of the post-Actium period, as the logic of the poem dictates, then it follows that the civil war of the sixth stanza must also be set in that same period, namely the period after Actium. This conclusion may be supported by the wording of lines 21–24. Horace's exact words are that a depleted generation of young men will hear that Roman citizens sharpened swords which would have been better employed against the Parthians, and they will hear too of fighting. Now the defeat of Crassus at Carrhae in 53 BC meant that a contrast between domestic conflict and fighting Parthia, such as we are given in lines 21–22, might have been appropriate at any point in the 40s and 30s, as *Epode* 7 implies;[60] but it is difficult to disconnect the present reference to Parthia from that in the last two lines of the poem, which, as we have seen, must refer to the period *after* 31 BC. And, if line 22 therefore refers to the period after Actium, it follows that the sharpening of swords in line 21 and the fighting of line 23 must also refer to the post-Actium period, thus confirming the conclusion about dramatic date at which we arrived earlier. It may seem odd that Horace is talking about civil war in the period after Octavian had put an end to civil war, yet that that is the case is confirmed by the third of his questions in lines 29–30: as we know from *Epode* 7 and elsewhere, *scelus* is an almost technical term for civil war.[61] How is this apparent paradox to be explained?

## VI Conspiracy Theory

In his book on civil war at Rome, Paul Jal observed that "un certain nombre de 'mouvements' que nous qualifions aujourd'hui de conjurations ou de simples troubles, ont été, par les contemporains, considérés comme de véritables guerres civiles plus ou moins avortées".[62] One such conspiracy was that of Catiline, as may be seen from Sallust (*BC* 47.2 *annum quem saepe ex prodigiis haruspices res-*

60 *Epo.* 7.1–10 *Quo, quo scelesti ruitis? aut cur dexteris | aptantur enses conditi? | parumne campis atque Neptuno super | fusum est Latini sanguinis, | non ut superbas inuidae Karthaginis | Romanus arces ureret | intactus aut Britannus ut descenderet | sacra catenatus uia, | sed ut secundum uota Parthorum sua | urbs haec periret dextera?*

61 Watson on *Epo.* 7.18, referring to P. Jal, *La guerre civile à Rome* (Paris 1963) 450–460.

62 Jal, *op. cit.* (n. 61) 56; cf. 7–8.

*pondissent bello ciuili cruentum fore*), and the similarities between Horace's ode and Cicero's poem (Section III) encourage one to ask whether Horace was referring to a similar "mouvement". Scholars have noted that there is a more or less "canonical list" of conspiracies against the *princeps*. The younger Seneca, for example, says: *in ipsa urbe Murenae, Caepionis, Lepidi, Egnati, aliorum in eum mucrones acuebantur* (*Brev. vit.* 4.5). And in the *De clementia* (1.9.5–6) he features a conversation between Augustus and his wife Livia: the *princeps* acknowledges, *ego sum nobilibus adulescentulis expositum caput in quod mucrones acuant* ..., while his wife repeats the list of conspirators in chronological order (... *Saluidienum Lepidus secutus est, Lepidum Murena, Murenam Caepio, Caepionem Egnatius, ut alios taceam, quos tantum ausos pudet*). It is naturally tempting to suggest a connection between the conspirators who "sharpened their sword-points" against the *princeps* and the citizens who "sharpened their swords" in Horace's ode. Most of the conspirators can be dismissed on chronological grounds, but this is not true of the conspiracy of Lepidus.

The sources tell us that at some point during the period between 31 and 30 BC Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, eldest son of the triumvir, plotted to kill Octavian.[63] Livy, a contemporary, described the plot in Book 133, which has not survived; but, according to the extant summary, *M. Lepidus ... coniuratione aduersus Caesarem facta bellum moliens oppressus et occisus est.* More detail is forthcoming from Velleius Paterculus (88.1–3):

> *Dum bello Actiaco Alexandrinoque Caesar imponit ultimam manum, M. Lepidus, iuuenis forma quam mente melior, Lepidi eius qui triumuir fuerat rei publicae constituendae filius, ... interficiendi, simul in urbem reuertisset, Caesaris consilia inierat. ‹erat› tunc urbis custodiis praepositus C. Maecenas ... hic speculatus est per summam quietem ac dissimulationem praecipitis consilia iuuenis et mira celeritate nullaque cum perturbatione aut rerum aut hominum oppresso Lepido immane noui ac resurrecturi belli ciuilis restinxit initium. et ille quidem male consultorum poenas exsoluit ... Seruilia Lepidi uxor ... praematura morte immortalem nominis sui pensauit memoriam.*

It is true that our other sources agree with Velleius that it was Maecenas rather than Octavian who suppressed the conspiracy, but this seems a minor quibble since we know from Appian (*BC* 4.50) that it was Octavian, to whom Maecenas sent him, who had him killed.

"Lepidus' conspiracy was serious", writes a recent scholar, "an attempt to renew civil war",[64] but most modern history books tend to dismiss the affair as of no consequence. In *The Cambridge Ancient History* Pelling calls it a "mysterious 'conspiracy'", putting the word "conspiracy" in scare quotes as if to deny its exi-

63 For discussion of the date see Woodman on Vell. 88.1, Louis on Suet. *Aug.* 19.1 (preferring 30 BC); Wardle on the latter passage prefers 31 BC.

64 Wardle on Suet. *Aug.* 19.1.

stence, while Crook in the same volume describes it as an "unconvincing story".[65] In a discussion of "opposition to Augustus", Raaflaub and Samons refer to "the isolated action of a young man": they dismiss the evidence of Livy and maintain, somewhat strangely, that "Despite its date, the affair still belongs to the civil war period".[66] In *The Roman Revolution* Syme referred to an "alleged" plot;[67] when he returned to the matter almost half a century later in *The Augustan Aristocracy*, he called it a "peculiar transaction" and said that it "is absent from the annalistic narrative of Cassius Dio".[68] This latter statement is of course untrue, or is at best a half-truth, and on an earlier page in the same volume Syme had indeed already provided the relevant reference to Dio; but at the same time he tried to suggest that any plotting was done by Octavian and Maecenas rather than by Lepidus.[69]

Syme's scepticism was no doubt born of his distrust of Livy and his loathing of Velleius, yet we should note how well Horace's ode corresponds to the evidence of these two historians. Why is Horace's civil war heard of only in retrospect by a future generation? Scholars refer to some admittedly memorable lines of Virgil's first *Georgic* (1.493–497), but the situation is explained exactly by Velleius: Maecenas acted with such dissembling and efficiency that few people at the time knew anything about Lepidus' plot; it was only in retrospect that his attempt at civil war became public knowledge. It is remarkable that Velleius should describe the beginning of that war, *belli ciuilis ... initium*, by the adjective *immane*, which is used not only of things which terrify but specifically of things monstrous and prodigious, exactly like those which Horace details at the start of the ode; in addition, lightning-strikes on a sanctuary – a portent listed also by Cicero but not by Virgil – portended danger "for the leading men in the state and those in the monarch's court".[70] Horace's phrase *acuisse ferrum* (21) is very apt to describe an enterprise which never reached full fruition. Finally, Livy's statement that Lepidus was "engineering war", *bellum moliens*, would make sense of Horace's statement that a future generation would hear of "fighting" (*pugnas*).

Moreover, if we look beyond Livy and Velleius to Appian and Dio, we derive the impression that Lepidus' plot had repercussions for other family members apart from his wife. Appian says (*BC* 4.50) that Lepidus' mother – the triumvir's wife – was prosecuted for withholding knowledge of the conspiracy, a statement

---

65 Respectively C.B.R. Pelling, "The Triumviral Period", and J.A. Crook, "Political history, 30 BC to AD 14", in A.K. Bowman et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. 10 (2nd ed., Cambridge 1996) 62 and 74.

66 K.A. Raaflaub and L.J. Samons, "Opposition to Augustus", in K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds.), *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1990) 422.

67 R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 298.

68 R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986) 272 and 384.

69 Syme, *op. cit.* (n. 68) 35 and n. 17.

70 Lyd. *Ostent.* p. 102, lines 5–7: εἰ δὲ καθ' ἱεροῦ πέσῃ κεραυνός, τοῖς ἐνδόξοις τοῦ πολιτεύματος καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐλὴν ὁ κίνδυνος ἐνσκήψει.

to which he adds that the elder Lepidus was "overlooked as being a person of no consequence". It is unclear whether these words imply the involvement of the elder Lepidus himself, who according to Appian went to some lengths to protest his innocence. A similar implication can be read into the text of Dio (54.15.4), who, on the topic of conspiracies against Augustus, says that the *princeps* "punished some men but, as for Lepidus, although he hated him, among other reasons because Lepidus' son had been caught and punished for conspiring against him, he was unwilling to put him to death but instead kept humiliating him in various ways". Now the elder Lepidus had been Pontifex Maximus since the death of Julius Caesar:[71] in this role he not only had a particular responsibility for the Vestal Virgins, to whose unavailing prayers Horace refers (26–28), but also had his official residence in the Regia, adjacent to the Temple of Vesta in the Forum. It seems more than just coincidence that these are the two buildings which Horace singles out as being flooded by the Tiber (15–16).

It is of course true, as we have seen, that Horace describes the future generation as depleted by the war (23–24) – which cannot have been the case, since the war never developed into anything significant. Yet it is clear from the question in lines 25–26 that there is an element of conditionality about the sixth stanza: civil war will take place *unless* some god rescues us. The dramatic moment of the ode is almost identical to that referred to by Cicero in his Third Catilinarian:

> *haruspices ... caedes atque incendia et legum interitum et bellum ciuile ac domesticum et totius urbis atque imperii occasum adpropinquare dixerunt,* nisi di immortales *omni ratione placati suo numine prope fata ipsa flexissent.*[72]

## VII Prayers (30b–52)

In the final section of the ode, starting at line 30b, the ascending tetracolon of addresses to Apollo, Venus, Mars and Mercury raises difficult problems. There is initial agreement amongst commentators that *siue* in lines 33 and 35 is equivalent to *uel ... si ...* (*OLD siue* 2), as often in Horace, and that with *uel* we have to supply *uenias* from line 30. Thus: "We pray that you should come, Apollo; or that you should come, Venus, if you prefer; or that you should come, Mars, if you have any thought for your people". At this point, however, there is disagreement. Rudd is seemingly alone in believing that *siue* in line 41, like its predecessors, is equivalent to *uel ... si ...* and that *uenias* has to be supplied once again:[73] "... or that you should come, Mercury, if ..." – and the remaining twelve lines of the ode make it clear

71 Here I am indebted to some suggestive remarks by Aaron Kachuck. See further R.T. Ridley, "The Absent Pontifex Maximus", *Historia* 54 (2005) 275–300.

72 Kiessling/Heinze, *op. cit.* (n. 25) on *ruentis* | *imperi* (25–26), quote Cicero's expression *imperii occasum* and suggest that both derive from oracular language.

73 Rudd, *op. cit.* (n. 2).

that Apollo, Venus and Mars were merely foils and that Mercury as the last named is the chosen saviour. Now there is some merit in the suggestion that *siue* in 41 is no different from *siue* in 33 and 35, as we shall see in a moment, but the interpretation adopted by Rudd is not without its difficulties: it is awkward that Mercury is urged to come (with the implication that he has not yet arrived) while at the same time his imitation of a young man on earth seems to imply that he is already present: "or we pray that you should come, Mercury, if you are imitating a young man on earth". Nisbet/Hubbard had already pointed out this difficulty, which they regarded as fatal,[74] but there seem to be two possible escapes. The first is to assume that the conditional clause is one of those places in Latin where the main idea is conveyed not by the principal verb but by a participle (*patiens*).[75] Thus: "or we pray that you should come, Mercury, if, having changed your shape and imitating a young man, you are prepared to be called the avenger of Julius Caesar". On this view, *patiens* has to have the implication of futurity which is required to complement the subjunctive *uenias.*[76] The alternative is to assume, much more radically, that *imitaris* in 42 is not present deponent in form but future perfect active: "or we pray that you should come, Mercury, if with a change of shape you will imitate [*lit.* will have imitated] a young man". *imitor* is of course a deponent verb, but there are a very few examples of the active form, though none in the future perfect.[77] If either of these alternatives were to be thought acceptable, Rudd's interpretation makes lines 41–44 a complete sentence, and the six clauses which follow are independent wishes arranged as two sets of three, of which the third in each case is negative (*redeas … intersis … neue … tollat ~ hic … hic … ames … neu sinas …*); the wishes themselves leave readers of the ode in no doubt that, despite the conditionality of lines 41–44, Mercury is indeed present in the person of Octavian.[78]

The majority of commentators, on the other hand, think that *siue* in line 41 is not at all equivalent to *uel … si …* but has the sense of "But, if it is rather the case that …". Thus: "But, if it is rather the case that you, Mercury, have changed your shape and are imitating a young man on earth, may you remain here as long as possible". This interpretation means that the use of *siue* in 41 is deceptive ("sleight

74 N/H on line 42 *imitaris* (p. 34).

75 See R. Kühner and C. Stegmann, *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache*, ii *Satzlehre*, Parts 1 and 2 (4th edn, Hannover 1962) 1.781–782, where the impression is given that the mannerism is characteristically Horatian.

76 Rudd's own translation is: "Or you come, o winged son of kindly Maia, if you take on the shape of a young man on earth and are willing to be called Caesar's avenger". Although "if you take on" is a strict translation of the Latin present, it may be suspected that, since English uses the present tense to refer to the future in a conditional sentence, Rudd has either misled himself (unlikely) or hopes that the futurity implied by "are willing to" will extend to "you take on". The latter is equivalent to the explanation offered in the text above.

77 See *TLL* 7.1.432.63 ff.

78 Fraenkel (n. 3) stresses, and West (n. 16) cautions, that Horace has expressed the identification conditionally.

of syntax", as David West aptly describes it):[79] we are led by lines 33 and 35 to expect the same usage but in fact are presented with a different one. Yet "sleight" of one sort or another is characteristic of Horace throughout the body of his work, this interpretation avoids the real problems associated with that of Rudd, and, since Octavian's successes seem amply demonstrated by the final stanza, it is greatly preferable to preclude any suggestion that Mercury has not yet arrived.

Mercury, like Mars and Venus in the preceding stanzas, is not named in the ode but is called, as he often is, *filius Maiae* (43), a matronymical periphrasis which – since μαῖα means "mother, nurse" – is expanded by means of a rhyming calque (*almae*).[80] The identification of Octavian with Mercury is unexpected: while it was regular for benefactors to be described in divine terms,[81] the presence of a real god in human form is much more striking.[82] The choice of Mercury, which has been much debated, will have been partly determined by the fact that Mercury is traditionally depicted as young: this suits the ode's dramatic date, since Octavian will then have been in his early 30s.[83]

## VIII Conclusion

In his narrative of 32 BC Dio says that Italy experienced various portents including a storm in the capital, during which the River Tiber seems to have flooded and caused considerable destruction (50.8.3). We do not know whether the storm struck in the winter or, if so, whether it was at the start of the year or the end; the latter is perhaps more likely, since Dio saw the portents as portending the battle of Actium in the following year. The battle was fought on 2 September, and Octavian's victory meant that two decades of more or less continuous civil war came to an end. Either in that same year or the following, however, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus attempted to re-start civil war by plotting to kill Octavian when he returned to Rome; but the plot was discovered and suppressed – swiftly and almost silently – by Maecenas, who handed the plotter over to Octavian for vengeance.

We cannot know whether it was the flood of 32 which inspired Horace to write the first five stanzas of the present ode; but, whether his inspiration was drawn from life or from literature or a combination of both, a Tiber flood, together with

79 West, *op. cit.* (n. 16) 13.

80 For more on the goddess see Vergados on *Hom. Hymn* 4.1 Μαιάδος υἱόν.

81 See Du Quesnay, *op. cit.* (n. 42) 102, with abundant evidence.

82 Ovid seems to have picked up on this when, towards the start of the *Metamorphoses*, he has Jupiter say *et deus humana lustro sub imagine terras* (1.213). The statement occurs in a passage in which a plot against Augustus (1.200–201) is followed by human and divine outrage and in due course by the flood which Jupiter unleashes (1.253ff.): the whole sequence is surely indebted to our ode (as various verbal similarities seem to confirm). I am grateful to Philip Hardie for some helpful remarks here.

83 Hutchinson, *op. cit.* (n. 10) 138, appears to see Mercury's youth as an argument against the ode's being published in 23 BC, when Augustus was 40, although he favours 27 as the dramatic date.

related portents, became for him a useful foil when he set about composing his ode. He composed the ode after the existence and suppression of Lepidus' plot had become public knowledge, but the ode's dramatic date is set before then, when the people, as yet ignorant of the plot, are described by the poet as terrified by portents into believing that the world was coming to an end in a cataclysm; but, writes Horace with the advantage of hindsight, in reality the portents portended a resurgence of civil war, which was prevented only by the intervention of the divine leader.[84] If there seems a mismatch between the putative cause of the portents and their real cause, between the end of the world and a civil war which scarcely got under way, the mismatch is the whole point. Horace intends to show that, after two decades of internecine conflict, when peace finally seemed to have been achieved, the renewal of civil war was equivalent to the end of the world, a fate from which the Romans were saved by the intervention of the *princeps*.

When Fraenkel discussed the question of why Virgil included his description of civil war in Book 1 of the *Georgics*, thought to have been published in 29 BC, he wrote as follows:[85]

> It is likely that Virgil, and probably Caesar and Maecenas as well, were convinced that easy-going optimism was dangerous and that, when peace and order seemed to be restored, the terrifying picture of civil war with all its misery and degradation should once more, in the poet's powerful vision, be brought before the nation. In the case of Horace we may be sure that this was his conviction.

Horace's conviction seems well borne out by the ode which he placed second in his collection.

Correspondence:
Anthony J. Woodman
Department of Classics
University of Virginia
PO Box 40078
Charlottesville, VA 22904–4788
USA
ajw6n@virginia.edu

84 Richard Hunter has suggested as a possible parallel Apollo's uterine prophecy of his resistance to the Gauls' attack on Delphi in 279 and of Ptolemy's killing of mutinous Celtic mercenaries, to all of which Callimachus attributes a cosmic significance (*Hymn* 4.171 ff.; cf. the scholia on 175–187 and Paus. 1.7.2).

85 Fraenkel, *op. cit.* (n. 3) 288.