

DISPROVING THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION THAT EXISTS IN HORACE'S VIEW ON WAR

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Abstract. *Throughout his poetry, Horace provides two seemingly different positions on war. Some poems show the beauty and glory of war. Others show its gruesome side that tore Rome apart. This paper intends to show that these two seemingly contradictory perspectives could still nevertheless be compatible. In the analysis, the author argues that Horace has a consistent position towards war, at least within the scope of Odes 3.2 and 2.1. While two poems do not do a lot, given how divergent they are, they do lend hope – hope that Horace does have a consistent overall in his larger corpus of poetry.*

Key words: *Horace, War, Augustan Poetry, Rome, Lyric Poetry, Ode 3.2, Ode 2.1*

Horace, in Ode 3.2, states that "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (Horace Odes 3.2.14). Indeed, throughout this ode, Horace highly praises the soldier that engages in warfare – whether this soldier is fighting Parthians or is facing any sort of danger. However, in Ode 2.1, Horace's description of war is somewhat different. He speaks of men cut down. Seas polluted with blood. Terrifying trumpets. Altogether, this scene is nasty and far different from the glorious depiction of war seen in Ode 3.2.

At first glance, these two different scenes seem entirely incompatible. It seems hard to believe that the same author could paint war as being so glorious in one poem and yet so horrid in another. Ultimately, though, I believe that Horace does not contradict himself. I intend to argue that his position on war has two key parts. First, that while war is bloody, it is necessary in building a strong citizenry. Second, that while civil war is awful, war against foreigners is noble and should be praised. In my paper, I will argue that this two-part position can be found in both poems. By doing so, I intend to show that Horace, at least within the scope of Odes 3.2 and 2.1, has a consistent position towards war.

I:

War is bloody and dangerous. Horace does not deny that fact in any of his poems. Particularly in Ode 2.1, he describes it as quite gruesome. His description is filled with images of "slaughter" and he himself calls war "tragic" (Ode 2.1.35, 36). But even Ode 3.2, the ode that praises the tough life of a soldier, has such images. Even though it is a more rosy description of a soldier's life, one filled with glory and valor, Horace does not omit any horrid references to war. He believes the soldier often finds himself in "perilous circumstances (*trepidis rebus*)" and has to contend with "unlenient death" (*mors...nec parci*)" (Ode 3.2.5-6, 14-15). However, Horace seems to believe that, despite all of these grim things, war ultimately does serve an important function. It allows men to grow. It allows them to eventually become strong citizens and potentially to go on to do greater things with their lives. In this part of my paper I intend to show that this viewpoint can be found in both Ode 3.2 and Ode 2.1.

A: Ode 3.2

In Ode 3.2, Horace believes that war can: help men become honorable citizens, lead them to immortality, and make them able to defend the republic.

Horace believes that war can make men honorable. He does not simply urge that a person should endure all of the troubles associated with war for nothing. All of the pain that a soldier endures in "hard military service" ultimately does have a greater purpose (Ode 3.2.1). It makes him tough. It allows him to eventually gain a gift that will help him out throughout the rest of his life: *virtus*.

Manliness. This concept is stressed in the fifth and sixth stanzas as the ultimate fruit of the soldier's labor. Ultimately, it will make him a noble individual who will be a model citizen in the government. He will respect the political process and will "not take up or put down the axes of office at the whim of popular favor" (Ode 3.2.19-20). This soldier will have a type of integrity. Even if he suffers "defeat at the polls" he will "shine on with honor undefiled" (Ode 3.2.19). However, Horace believes that enduring the toils of war could lead to a prize greater than just regular honor.

Namely, immortality. War could potentially end up creating such strong citizens that they become practically heroes/gods. If these soldiers endured in war and overcame death, then they must have something special. Not necessarily just a simple type of manly courage, but a "true courage (an attitude of mind in addition to physical bravery) by which immortality may be achieved" (Commentary on Horace *The Odes* Kenneth Quinn 245). War, thus, stands as a way of improving the citizen body. It is a way to "bring out that true courage of which immortal heroes are made" (Quinn 244). It allows the Roman people to forge citizens who are far from the "vulgar gatherings and the damp earth" and are the future leaders of the state (Horace Ode 3.2.23-24). Perhaps it may seem extreme to practically apotheosize great soldiers. But I think Horace much rather prefers this extreme to the other possible one: weak citizens.

Horace wants citizens who are able to defend Rome. One thing that he definitely does not want is the "boneless backs of peace-loving boys" in the government (Ode 3.2.23-24). Horace wants to have a citizenry that is able to defend Rome from the conflicts of tomorrow. He is writing from the perspective where "the Parthians and the situation in the East are treated as an emergency with which the younger generation will have to deal on the battlefield" (Quinn 245). Military service is thus useful for guarding against such

threats. It allows Roman citizens to have a basic type of manliness, so that they can guard against things like "fierce Parthians (*Parthos ferocis*)" and "warring tyrants (*bellantis tyranni*)" (Ode 3.2.3, 8). But the usefulness of war is not just described in Ode 3.2.

B: Ode 2.1

Even in Ode 2.1, where Horace cries out against the horrors of war, he admits that it can serve a useful function. In this poem, Horace sees war as simply the stepping stone to Pollio's greater calling as a historian and a tragedy writer.

Horace believes that a military career is just the beginning for his friend Pollio. That is not to say that Horace thinks Pollio's military achievements are insignificant. In fact, Horace praises his friend as a person who gained "eternal honor in the Dalmatian triumph" (Ode 2.1.15-16). Indeed, rightly so. For Pollio, this particular triumph likely "was the climax of his military career" (Quinn 197). Most people would view this as the greatest achievement they could ever hope for. However, Horace would not agree.

Horace ultimately sees Pollio as a writer. Not a soldier. All of Pollio's military achievements were simply in preparation for a greater calling: writing. In fact, the main benefit that Horace sees from Pollio's participation in the war is that he can now write a history about it. By doing so, Pollio is able to "put in order events of state" for all of Rome (Ode 2.1.11). Moreover, Pollio, after gaining all of these experiences, in war and in history writing, can now finally achieve his main ambition: writing about Greek Tragedy. Horace calls this Pollio's "great employment (*grande munus*)" and believes that everything simply led up to this moment (Ode 2.1.12). All of the battles Pollio may have fought, all of the soldiers that he may have led...all of these things were ultimately to make him a better historian and a better tragedian.

Thus both Ode 3.2 and 2.1 can be shown to have elements that point out the usefulness of war. However, that is not the only way that the two poems can be reconciled.

II:

Both poems do describe war. However, they describe different types of war. Ode 3.2 describes war against foreigners. Meanwhile, Ode 2.1 describes mostly civil war. I intend to show that while Horace thinks civil war is quite horrid, he believes that war against foreigners is noble. I will demonstrate this by first looking at Ode 3.2 and then Ode 2.1.

A: Ode 3.2

In Ode 3.2, Horace describes two military conflicts. The first conflict is against Parthians. The second one is against some vague foreign king. Both wars are described as acceptable and noble.

Horace seems very eager to encourage a war against the Parthians. In fact, in this poem, he does not really seem like an innocent bystander watching the war. He almost seems like an instigator. He uses the jussive subjunctive of the verb *vexere*, to prod the soldier into war against the Medes (Ode 3.2.4). But he does not just urge war against the Medes. He also sets up the Parthians as the primary enemies of Rome.

In his description, he paints the Parthian as a worthy foe that the Roman soldier needs to be prepared against. Horace does not use any derogatory adjective towards the Par-

thians. He does not call the Parthian corrupt, spoiled, or weak. He gives the Parthians the epithet "*ferocis*" and sets him up as a challenge that a typical Roman should not take lightly (Ode 3.2.3). In the same sentence, Horace practically urges the Roman to ride off and engage the Parthians. He uses the passive periphrastic of *metuo* to indicate an obligation to become a "rider that ought to be feared" (Ode 3.2.4).

Moreover, Horace seems to urge that the Roman should train with arms for this conflict. Horace applies the accusative of respect to show how exactly a soldier can be the most frightening to the Parthians – with a "spear (*hasta*)" (Ode 3.2.4). This is specifically because the spear will have the greatest effect against the Parthians. The soldier "can pursue the Parthians (noted for their horsemanship) to whom he will appear... a formidable figure with his spear" (Quinn 245). In a short sentence, Horace creates an exciting conflict between the Parthians and the Romans. There is no sadness. No lamentations about the horrid nature of war. Only a strong rivalry is created.

But Horace does not stop there. He continues in the next stanza to highlight another conflict between Romans and foreigners. In Stanza 2, Horace creates almost a Homeric-level conflict using a specific type of imagery. He describes a foreign queen looking down "from enemy walls (*ex moenibus hosticis*)" onto the Roman soldier (Horace 3.2.1). In such a case, it is difficult not to compare this scene to one from *The Iliad*. Indeed, even Ronald Basto notes the epic nature of this imagery. He claims that "it takes but little imagination to project Horace's scenario, in general, as a compressed version of Aen. 12" (*Horace Odes 3.2 and Aeneid 12* Basto 127). But Horace does not just stop at describing the walls.

He goes on to entirely paint the opponent of the Roman in negative terms. He describes the opposing king as a "tyrant (*tyranni*)," giving the Roman another reason to hate his enemy (Ode 3.2.7). Moreover, if war did break out, Horace stresses that it would not be the fault of the Roman. The Roman would simply be acting in self-defense as "a lion / who is wild when touched" (3.2.10-11). His actions would be entirely justified. Any slaughter he might cause would simply be the fault of the "warring (*bellantis*)" ruler who disturbed the peace (Ode 3.2.7). Not of the Roman.

In this poem, even though Horace discusses serious warfare, it is always in a positive light. Glorious. Justified. Patriotic. There really does not seem anything wrong with war against foreigners. But this perspective changes when Horace describes domestic war.

B: Ode 2.1

Civil war is gruesome to Horace. He recoils from it and finds it awful. I intend to show that all references in the poem are placed in a negative light. Moreover, I will also show that the few references to foreign war are all placed in a positive light.

The conflict that Horace is describing in this ode is The First Civil War. However, there is something about this poem. Unlike in Ode 3.2, Horace is not urging soldiers to go fight. He is not using any positive adjectives to describe the battles. On the contrary, most of the imagery seen is quite depressing. Instead of describing the war as glorious, he describes it as if people were committing "crimes (*vitia*)" (Ode 2.1.2). Moreover, the battles are not described with adjectives such as *magna* or *longa*. Instead, they are described as *impia* (2.1.30). Unholy. This entire domestic conflict is seriously disturbing to Horace.

Indeed, how disturbing it is to him can especially be seen in the ninth stanza. The tricolon that he uses really highlights to how much of a degree he is repulsed. He speaks of

tainted swells, polluted seas, and shores tainted with blood. For Horace, it is almost as if the whole Roman Empire has been wrenched apart by this conflict. In fact, the words *Dauniae* shows how personally Horace has been touched by the civil war. The word "*Dauniae* is Horace's favored way of referring to his home region of Apulia. The slaughter he is thinking of in lines 34f. is very much that of his own people" (*Horace Behind the Public Poetry*, R.O.A.M. Lyne 94). Horace feels connected to this conflict and this is shown by the last word in the poem. Finally, the word *nostro* finishes the main part of the poem and the tricolon. In the end, Horace ends the "poem... by emphasizing the unity of Italy" (Quinn 198). This word emphasizes how all of Rome has lost blood in this conflict.

But oddly enough, within the same poem, all conflicts with foreigners are painted in a positive light. The war that happened in Dalmatia is not described with any horrors that are seen elsewhere in the poem. Instead, the conflict is described solely in terms of "eternal honors (*aeternos honores*)" and "the triumph (*triumpho*)" that occurred (Ode 2.1.15-16). Moreover, when talking about the fall of Spain, Horace is almost urging Romans to stop fighting and focus on fighting the foreigners. He describes how while Rome tore itself apart "the Parthians listened" to the entire conflict (Ode 2.1.32). He almost wants Rome to pull itself together and concentrate on the real enemy. Overall, Horace shows a deep preoccupation with fighting against foreigners and is disgusted by Romans fighting one another.

III:

Horace does have a consistent position on war. It may not seem like it at first. Especially when examining two such different poems as Ode 3.2 and Ode 2.1. One describing war as a glorious and noble enterprise. The other primarily describing it as the cause of great horrors. In such a scenario, it is very hard not to simply accuse Horace of being a hypocrite. Indeed, it is very tempting. But like most other temptations it should be resisted. Instead, the reader should look closely at the poems and look for threads that both odes share. I did. In my analysis, I found two. First that Horace sees war as useful in preparing citizens for future endeavors. Second, that while Horace does not mind having foreigners as enemies, he cannot bear seeing his compatriots cutting one another down.

These two little threads cannot do a lot. They are after all only two poems in a sea of many. But they can prove something. That, within the scope of at least these two poems, Horace has a consistent position towards war. Maybe that is not achieving lot, but it does lend hope – that in the larger scope of things maybe he is consistent, maybe he isn't a hypocrite after all.

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POBIJANJE OČIGLEDNE PROTIVREČNOSTI KOJA POSTOJI U HORACIJEVOM STAVU PREMA RATU

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Horacijeve Ode 2.1 i 3.2 na prvi pogled odaju utisak da ne potiču od istog pisca. Jedna oda prikazuje rat krvavim i besmislenim. Druga oda prikazuje rat u drugačijoj svetlosti – kao događaj pun slave koji transformiše dečake u muškarce. Na prvi pogled, može se steći utisak da Horacije ima nekonzistentu perspektivu prema ratu. U ovom radu pokazali smo da ove dve pesme, bez obzira na površinske razlike, u stvari imaju konzistentu poziciju prema ratu.

Ključne reči: *Horacije, rat, poezija u doba Augusta, lirski poezija, Oda 3.2, Oda 2.1*