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The Symmetry of Horace, Odes 3, 16

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Ed. Fraenkel's assessment of Odes 3, 16 is representative of the judgment of critics and commentators: "*Inclusam Danaen* is a very polished poem, and its thoughts are not unworthy of Horace, but it has no wings."¹ More recently, Gordon Williams remarked that the "ingenuity and unexpectedness of its structure" (whereby the ode begins with notion of the excessive power of money and concludes that the minimal adequate amount of possessions creates happiness) are "the best feature of the poem". But Williams, like Fraenkel, issues a negative final verdict: "In spite of this the poem scarcely comes alive."² R. Joseph Schork attempted to counter the prevailing negative responses to Horace's ode in a re-evaluation which, while focusing on the exempla, judged the poem to be "unified and complex"³.

Here I would like to examine in some detail the poem's structure and to explore its "polish", concerning which Fraenkel refers the reader to Heinze's suggestive but brief introduction. Heinze comments⁴: "Entsprechend der Bedeutung des Gedichts, das nicht als Eingebung des Augenblicks, sondern als reiflich überlegter Ausdruck philosophisch begründeten Entschlusses erscheinen soll, ist der Ton ruhig und bestimmt, die Sprache sehr gewählt und vielfach künstlich pointiert; man beachte den Wechsel der Verben 9–16 und die Variation in der Bezeichnung des einen Hauptbegriffs durch *pretium aurum lucrum munera pecunia res opes sors vectigalia* – jeder dieser Ausdrücke an seiner Stelle einzig geeignet – sowie die sich steigernden Hyperbeln 26fg., 31fg., 41fg. Die gern antithetisch geformten knappen Sentenzen geben der Rede Kraft und Ausdruck, die geflissentlich paradoxe Zuspitzung – z.B. 21fg. 25. 28. 30–32. 39fg. – gemahnt an stoischen Rigorismus."

Let us begin our analysis of the ode by noting that it falls into two main blocks: lines 1–16 and lines 17–44. Lines 1–16 present the power of gold through mythological (1–8) and heroic-historical (9–16) examples. The ode's second and larger half (17–44) begins with a transitional quatrain which turns our attention to Horace and Maecenas and the dangers of wealth to oneself. This personal focus is continued in two twelve-line sections (21–32 and 33–44) in each of

1 Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 229.

2 Gordon W. Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford 1969) 103.

3 R. Joseph Schork, *Aemulos Reges: Allusion and Theme in Horace 3. 16*, Trans. Am. Philol. Ass. 102 (1971) 515–539.

4 A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus. Oden und Epoden*⁷ (Berlin 1930; reprint Hildesheim/Zürich 1984) 325.

which Horace explores moderation of desire and his personal contentment. Thus the ode yields the following linear allocation:

$$44 = 16 (8+8) + 28 (4+12+12).$$

The structure is bipartite with two very unequal parts of 16 lines and 28 lines. But we need to note that linear symmetry is apparent in that the poem's first part (1–16) is built of two equal sections of eight lines each (1–8 and 9–16) as is the poem's second part which is constructed of a four-line introduction (17–20) and two equal sections of twelve lines each (21–32 and 33–44). We note further that just as the two equal sections (1–8 and 9–16) of the ode's first part developed, in related but different examples, the same idea of the power of wealth, so too do the two equal sections (21–32 and 33–44) of the ode's second part present similar concepts of personal moderation, the favor of god and paradoxical happiness. Thus, in an overall structure which is asymmetrical, the two main parts reveal a symmetry of internal structure – almost as if the poet were reinforcing the ethical paradoxes of the ode itself that the power of money to control others can become a danger to oneself and that the less an individual pursues wealth the richer he becomes.

Inclusam Danaen turris aenea 1
robustaeque fores et vigilum canum
tristes excubiae munierant satis
nocturnis ab adulteris,

si non Acrisium virginis abditae 5
custodem pavidum Iuppiter et Venus
risissent: fore enim tutum iter et patens
converso in pretium deo.

As we turn from the overall structure of the ode to an inspection of its elements, we observe that the poem's first word *inclusam* strikes the note of the imprisonment of Danae, the theme of lines 1–8. The first quatrain portrays Acrisius's extraordinary precautions to isolate Danae, while the second quatrain shows with a touch of mild irony how Jupiter's gold overcomes these. Horace binds together the first four lines by an extraordinary clustering of nouns and modifiers. Of the sixteen words which make up lines 1–4 only four words (*et*, *munierant*, *satis*, and *ab*) do not fit the pattern of noun and modifier:

M	N		N	M
M	N	X	M	N
M	N		X	X
M	X	N		

Each line begins with a modifier followed by its noun, while the first two lines each have two pairs of modifier and noun and the last two lines each have one

pair. The arrangement of words in line one is chiasmic (MNNM); in line two the arrangement is balanced (MNMN). The result is pattern with variation. Horace has so placed the nouns in these first four lines that we begin with the maiden Danae and standing between her and the unwanted lovers are her protectors: the bronze tower, oaken doors, and watchful dogs. The catalogue of three items, an accumulation to which Horace is partial, will be matched by another catalogue of three items (11–16) in the second section of this first part of the ode. The last word of the first quatrain, *adulteris*, serves as a transitional word to the second quatrain in which the supreme lover, Jupiter, makes his appearance. Note also that the last word of the first quatrain *adulteris* finds its identification in the last word of the second quatrain *deo*.

The second quatrain introduces the human pair of Acrisius and the concealed maiden in line 5 and next their opposing divine pair of Jupiter and Venus in line 6. The verb *risissent* has been effectively withheld until the beginning of line 7, to create a degree of suspense and climax. Additional balance between the first and second quatrain is achieved by assigning each one main verb in the third line (*munierant* [3] and *risissent* [7]) and by the mention of Danae in the first line of each (1 and 5). The laughter of the first word of the third line of the second quatrain contrasts with the seriousness (*tristes*) of the first word of the third line of the first quatrain. In line 8 the conversion of god into a bribe is underscored by the juxtaposition of *pretium deo*. *Pretium* also serves as the transitional word at the end of the second quatrain to *aurum*, the first word of the third quatrain. We move from a bribe to its precise physical form of gold.

<i>aurum per medios ire satellites</i>	
<i>et perrumpere amat saxa potentius</i>	10
<i>ictu fulmineo: concidit auguris</i>	
<i>Argivi domus ob lucrum</i>	
<i>demersa exitio: diffidit urbium</i>	
<i>portas vir Macedo et subruit aemulos</i>	
<i>reges muneribus; munera navium</i>	15
<i>saevos illaqueant duces.</i>	

Lines 9–16 begin with a general statement of the power of gold to travel through the midst of guardians and to break through rocks with a force greater than that of a lightning bolt, and then proceed to cite three specific incidents from the world of heroes and history moving from remote to recent times – a human parallel to the action of the gods in lines 1–8. While we have already noted that *pretium* in line 8 prepared the reader for *aurum* in line 9, it should be remarked that *iter* in line 7 becomes *ire* in line 9 and thereby provides another verbal linkage between the units.

Horace has structured the two quatrains of lines 9–16 with special care. Not only do the first two and one half lines (9–11) serve as a general introduction to

the three specific examples which follow but they also reflect back to the previous two quatrains (1–8): *satellites* (9) recalls Acrisius (5) and his *excubiae* (3); *saxa* (10) reflects the *turris* (1); and *ictu fulmineo* (11) is the characteristic weapon of Jupiter (6). The three clauses of lines 11–14 each begin with a perfect indicative verb appropriate to the destruction of a structure or tower: *concidit* (11) – to tumble to the ground; *diffidit* (13) – to cleave asunder; *subruit* (14) – to dig under or to undermine. Further the scholiast suggests that *demersa* (13) alludes to the fact that the earth parted and swallowed up Amphiaras⁵. As the third quatrain began with the word *aurum* (9) so it ends with the related word *lucrum* (12). The phrase *demersa exitio* (13) both concludes the account of Amphiaras’ destruction and introduces in the fourth quatrain the demise of the rival kings of Philip of Macedon and the stern naval commanders. *Demersa* in its sense of “sunk” or “submerged” additionally foreshadows the shift from destruction on land to entrapment at sea (*navium ... duces*, 15–16). Heinze comments that Horace wishes to show “dass das Gold *terra marique* herrscht”⁶. Of the three exempla chosen by Horace, the first two (Amphiaras and Philip of Macedon) refer to Greece. If as most scholars believe, the third example *navium ... duces* refers especially to Menas⁷, the phrase takes us to contemporary history and the Rome of Octavian. Menas, who was an admiral, twice deserted Sextus Pompey (39–36 B.C.) and finally remained in the service of Octavian. Thus the last word of the fourth quatrain, *duces*, can also appropriately serve as a transition to the notion of current prominence and leadership (*tollere verticem*, 19) and to Maecenas, the *equitum decus* in the fifth quatrain.

Woven through these first sixteen lines is a repeated theme which begins with the ineffective metal of bronze (*aenea*) in the very first line, and then becomes a series of references to the more powerful metal of gold (*pretium* 8, *aurum* 9, *lucrum* 12, *muneribus* 15, *munera* 15). The theme in the form of wealth continues with the very first line of the fifth quatrain (*pecuniam*, 17) and runs through to the very end of the poem’s second part in an astonishing series (*maiorum* 18, *plura* 21, *plura* 22, *nil* 22, *divitum* 23, *rei* 25, *magnas ... opes inops* 28, *paucorum* 30, *sorte* 32, *pauperies* 37, *plura* 38, *parva ... vectigalia* 39–40, *multa* 42, *multa* 43, *parca* 44, *satis* 44).

*crescentem sequitur cura pecuniam
maiorumque fames. iure perhorru
late conspicuum tollere verticem,
Maecenas, equitum decus.*

20

5 O. Keller, *Pseudoacronis scholia in Horatium vetustiora* 1 (Leipzig 1902), on line 13, p. 278.

6 Kiessling-Heinze, loc. cit. (above, note 4) 327.

7 On Menas see Schork, loc. cit. (above, note 3) 528–532. Menas is almost certainly the object of Horace’s invective in epode 4, itself an intricately structured poem, for which see Robert W. Carrubba, *The Technique of the Double Structure in Horace*, *Mnemosyne* 20 (1967) 68–75.

*quanto quisque sibi plura negaverit,
ab dis plura feret: nil cupientium
nudus castra peto et transfuga divitum
partis linquere gestio,*

contemptae dominus splendidior rei 25
*quam si quidquid arat impiger Apulus
occultare meis dicerer horreis
magnas inter opes inops.*

*purae rivus aquae silvae iugerum
paucorum et segetis certa fides meae* 30
*fulgentem imperio fertilis Africae
fallit sorte beatior.*

*quamquam nec Calabriae mella ferunt apes
nec Laestrygonia Bacchus in amphora
languescit mihi nec pinguis Gallicis* 35
crescunt vellera pascuis,

*importuna tamen pauperies abest
nec, si plura velim, tu dare deneges.
contracto melius parva cupidine
vectigalia porrigam,* 40

*quam si Mygdoniis regnum Alyattei
campis continuem. multa petentibus
desunt multa: bene est, cui deus obtulit
parca quod satis est manu.*

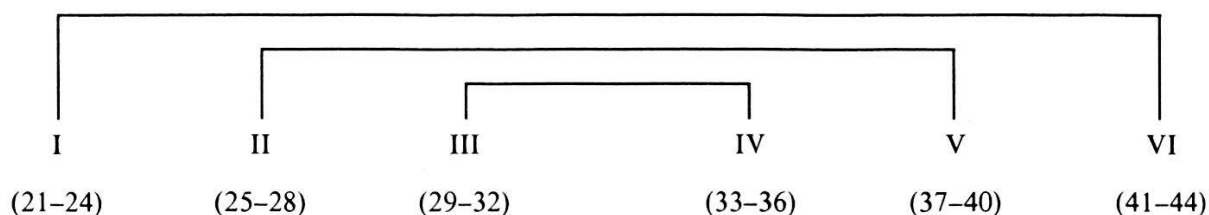
Lines 17–44 comprise the ode’s second and larger part, and while they again focus on the power of wealth, that power now manifests itself not in the manipulation of others but in the harm it can do to oneself. Paradoxically, the more one denies himself worldly possessions, the wealthier he will be in mind and morals. Happiness and the favor of heaven are found in moderating our desires. As Horace concludes (43–44), “blessed is the man to whom god with sparing hand has given what is sufficient”.

The ode shifts from myth and history to reality and the present, from Danae, Philip and others to Horace and Maecenas. In *crescentem*, the very first word of the first line of the fifth quatrain, Horace strikes the note of quantity and states immediately the paradox that more money does not bring happiness with a striking juxtaposition of *cura pecuniam* at the end of the line. The first word of the next line *maiorumque* (18) again stresses the concept of quantity of wealth which will run through the rest of the ode. A second artful juxtaposition occurs in the placement of Horace’s person or *verticem* at the end of line 19 where it is immediately followed by Maecenas (20), his friend and model, and

thus can underscore the closeness of their relationship, which is later examined. In sum, this introductory quatrain carries within its four lines (17–20) the basic theme and the two persons who are central to the remainder of the ode⁸. It also concludes exquisitely with an entire line (20) complimenting Horace's patron: *Maecenas, equitum decus*.

In what is otherwise a useful analysis of the overall structure of the ode, Collinge comments that lines 21–32 and 33–44⁹: "... are no more than a double treatment of one idea, or perhaps alternative drafts (cf. i. 15 above). The removal of either vv. 21–32 or 33–44 would leave a satisfactory a/b (general/personal) distrophic form, in two groups of four stanzas, the first being vv. 1–16, the second 17–32, or 17–20 plus 33–44; but the text is not to be touched for that reason."

It seems that Collinge has overstressed the common ground of these two sections and has missed key structural signals. In short, my position is that lines 21–32 and 33–44, while they are closely related and do overlap somewhat in sense, nonetheless unfold a carefully structured whole. Horace has in fact fashioned the three quatrains of the first section (21–32) and the three quatrains of the second section (33–44) in a chiasmus so that corresponding quatrains occur in opposite order:



Quatrains I and VI focus on the paradox of the denial of wealth and the acquisition of happiness from the gods. In the first quatrain the repetition *plura ... plura* occurs; it is matched by the repetition *multa ... multa* in the sixth quatrain. In the first quatrain a person (*quisque*) receives (*feret*) from the gods (*dis*), while in the sixth quatrain god (*deus*) gives (*obtulit*) to a person (*cui*). In the first quatrain Horace seeks (*peto*) the camp of those who desire nothing (*nil cupientium*); by contrast in the sixth quatrain others seek much (*multa petentibus*). Quatrains II and V reveal how Horace by rejecting excessive wealth avoids being poor (in happiness) amidst worldly riches and how he increases his income by contracting his desires. The key to the relationship of these two quatrains can be found in four words: *contemptae ... rei* (25) and *contracto ... cupidine* (39): that is, in Horace's personal ability to control his desires for wealth. Quatrains III and IV catalogue respectively three possessions of Horace

8 Michael C. J. Putnam, *Horace c. I. 20*, *Class. Journ.* 64 (1969) 153–157, reminds us of the application of these lines (17–20): "Horace reads the lesson to himself, apparently (*perhorru*). It is oriented more obviously at the knight."

9 N. E. Collinge, *The Structure of Horace's Odes* (London 1961) 110–111.

(stream, woods, crops) and three things that he does not possess (Calabrian bees, Laestrygonian wine, Cisalpine sheep).

Let us now consider further the relationships of these six quatrains. Lines 21–24 begin by asserting a practical rule that the more possessions a person denies himself, the more happiness he will receive from the gods. Then Horace, shifting to the first person verb, announces his conversion (*transfuga*, 23) to this principle. The poet is deserting the party of the rich, and nude he seeks the camp of those who desire nothing. There is a fine note of modesty (a bit extravagant and feigned) in the poet's profession of what appears to be a sudden and total conversion of belief and conduct. Commentators have been disturbed by the literal meaning of Horace. Surely, they assure us, Horace has overstated his position and is not to be pressed too closely¹⁰. And the commentators, of course, are correct: Horace is not disavowing all possessions, but they and we can only know what Horace really means when the entire poem has unfolded and his message has been defined in careful stages and finally encapsuled in the gnomic statement of the ode's last two lines. In despising wealth¹¹ Horace achieved a mastery which is greater than that of a rich landowner who hoards his grain but is poor amid riches because his inordinate desire for wealth cannot be satisfied (25–28)¹². In the next quatrain (29–32) Horace reveals what possessions he does own: a pure stream, a few acres of woods, and an unfailing crop. These limited holdings in an atmosphere of confident trust (*certa fides*, 30) assure Horace a state of happiness greater than that of the governor of the fertile province of Africa, whose position depends on chance (*sorte*, 32) and who does not even realize where happiness truly lies (*fallit*, 30). Deftly positioned as the very last word of these first three quatrains and at the midpoint of the six quatrains is the key word *beatior* – the true form of happiness.

Having listed three modest possessions in the last of the first three quatrains, Horace in the first of the last three quatrains catalogues three lavish and unnecessary holdings which he does not enjoy and which do not create happiness: Calabrian bees, Laestrygonian wine and Cisalpine sheep. Yet, Horace assures us that he avoids crushing poverty and, if he desired more (which he does not), Maecenas would not deny him (and need not). The phrase *tu ... deneges* (38) once again focuses our attention on Maecenas who, as patron, supplies the poet's material needs, but who has slipped from our attention since

10 For example, T. E. Page, *Q. Horatii Flacci, Carminum Libri IV*² (London 1895) 355.

11 E. C. Wickham, *The Works of Horace* 1 (Oxford 1896) 212, comments: "contemptae, 'which wealthier men despise.' 'Satis beatus unicus Sabinis.' Bentley takes it as 'contemptae a se ipso,' and so as = 'non possessae,' making it an oxymoron answering to 'inter opes inops': the poor man possessing all things though he has nothing, the rich man a pauper in the midst of his riches." Both S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven 1962) 104, and Matthew S. Santirocco, *Unity and Design in Horace's Odes* (Chapel Hill 1986) 162, translate *contemptae ... rei* as the "wealth I despise".

12 On the theme of *avaritia* and *luxuria*, see Gunnar Carlsson, *Zu einigen Oden des Horaz*, *Eranos* 42 (1944) 13–17.

the compliment of line 20. With respect to Collinge's analysis, we need to remark that had the poem ended at line 32, this gracious and essential expression of trust and gratitude would have been absent. Now Horace continues to refine his message by telling the reader in the first person verb that the poet increases his income better by contracting his desires than by extending land holdings in Asia (38–42). Notice how *contracto cupidine* (39) partially corrects the hyperbole of *nil cupientium* (22); the poet counsels restraint, not a complete denial of desire. With that Horace returns to the third person verb and the other side of *plura negavit ... plura feret* (21–22) in *multa petentibus desunt multa* (42–43). Most important, however, the hyperbolic notion of *nil cupientium* (22) and that of *beatior* (32) receive their clear and final definition in *bene est, cui deus obtulit / parca quod satis est manu* (43–44). *Beatior* at the end of the third quatrain corresponds to *bene* toward the end of the sixth quatrain: the truly happy person = the one who is morally well off. *Nil cupientium* assumes its precise philosophic form in the ode's last line: *parca quod satis est manu*. The initial overstatement or incomplete statement of “desiring nothing” now is understood to mean “to desire nothing except what is enough, and enough is what one receives from god when he gives with a sparing hand”. The analogy on the human level virtually makes itself: as god gives enough to the man who desires little, so Maecenas has given adequately to Horace who does not wish more.

The six quatrains of lines 21–44 have as their geographical setting Italy and two provinces of the Roman empire. In the first three quatrains, Horace refers to Apulia (16), and his farm (29–30) in Italy and the fertile province of Africa (31). In the second three quatrains, the poet mentions Calabria (33), Laestrygonia (Formiae) (34), and Cisalpine Gaul (35)¹³ in Italy and the kingdom of Alyattes and Mygdonian plains (41–42) in the province of Asia. Each of the two sections also includes a rejected comparison introduced by the phrase *quam si* (26, 41). Horace could not be happier were he to own large granaries in Apulia nor could he increase his income better by extending properties in Asia. Perhaps an additional touch of symmetry can be observed in beginning the first quatrain with *quanto quisque* (21) and the fourth quatrain with *quamquam* (33). As was discussed earlier, the last six quatrains fashion a chiasmic pattern with third person verb forms at the beginning and end. The deliberate arrangement of verb forms is in fact more extensive: Horace begins and ends with third person verbs, employs them again in the central quatrains, and in between favors the first person verb. The following list of verbs with their person numbers makes this pattern clear:

13 The adjective *Gallicis* refers to Cisalpine Gaul, which, especially along the Po, was noted for the production of fine white wool. See Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 8, 190.

	I	
<i>negaverit</i>		3
<i>feret</i>		3
<i>peto</i>		1
<i>gestio</i>		1
	II	
<i>arat</i>		3
<i>dicerer</i>		1
	III	
<i>fallit</i>		3
	IV	
<i>ferunt</i>		3
<i>languescit</i>		3
<i>crescunt</i>		3
	V	
<i>abest</i>		3
<i>velim</i>		1
<i>deneges</i>		2
<i>porrigam</i>		1
	VI	
<i>continuem</i>		1
<i>desunt</i>		3
<i>est</i>		3
<i>obtulit</i>		3
<i>est</i>		3

Two ancillary features which help create a polished and patterned structure for the entire ode can be noted. The ode's first part contained two catalogues each of three items (tower, doors, dogs [1–4] and Amphiaraus, Philip and *duces* [11–16]) while the ode's second part also includes two catalogues each of three items (stream, woods, crop [29–32] and bees, wine, sheep [33–36]). Further, these four catalogues are so distributed that one catalogue occurs in each of the two sections of part one (1–8 and 9–16) and in each of the two major sections of part two (21–32 and 33–44). It is perhaps a fragile point that the word *satis* is used only twice in this ode: in the first quatrain (3) and in the last quatrain (44). In the first instance extravagant precautions were not sufficient to protect Danae; in the second instance a frugal hand gives sufficiency.

Before closing this analysis of ode 3, 16, we need to ask how god (*deus*) is viewed and whether the concept of god develops. Horace, in the first part of the poem, has rationalized with mild irony the traditional myth of how Jupiter

visited Danae in a shower of gold. The god of the ode (*deo*, 7), despite the prudent care of Acrisius, immorally violates the maiden through bribery by gold. But when the word for god or gods appears in the second part of the ode, it has been demythologized and purified so much that a Christian following a vow of poverty could find comfort in it. The *dis* (22) from whom the individual, who practices self-denial, will receive correspondingly greater rewards and the *deus* (43), who gives the exactly right minimum of worldly possessions, are moral deities without mythological or anthropomorphic touches. Or perhaps the *deus* of the second part of the ode can be seen as a vaguely conceived divine power which stands in place of the philosophical principle that virtue creates its own happiness. At any rate, once again the ode displays a coherent pattern which unfolds in stages and which is complete only at the very end.