The prophet's warning : Horace, Odes 1.15

Autor(en): **Bradshaw, Arnold**

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **65 (2008)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **20.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1320

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.
Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.
Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Ein Dienst der *ETH-Bibliothek*
ETH Zürich, Rämistrasse 101, 8092 Zürich, Schweiz, www.library.ethz.ch

http://www.e-periodica.ch

The Prophet's Warning: Horace, *Odes* 1.15

By Arnold Bradshaw, Durham

Abstract: This ode, which has on dubious grounds been regarded as an early experiment in pure narrative, should rather be viewed as a miniature drama of a kind found in other odes. The speech of Nereus is not a detailed prophecy of the consequences of the abduction of Helen but a last moment warning to prevent Paris from continuing his fatal voyage. Explanations are suggested for the choice of Greek heroes named as potential opponents of Paris as well as for the fact that none of the threatened encounters correspond to the actions described in the *Iliad*.

First it will be useful to mention briefly three theories which have loomed large in critical comment: that the poem is an allegory; that it is based on poems of Bacchylides and Alcaeus; that it is an early ode showing signs of immature craftsmanship.[1] Interpretation of the ode as an allegory goes back more than 500 years; Paris and Helen are supposed to be the counterparts of Antony and Cleopatra, while the Trojan war represents the war of Actium and its aftermath; some critics also give an ethical dimension to the narrative, seeing in it an Augustan attack on adultery and oriental immorality.[2] This theory, in one form or another, has been accepted by a number of modern scholars, but opinion is divided, and it has been rejected by others no less eminent. If the poem was written with an oblique reference of this kind, it is astonishing that it says so much about Paris and so little about Helen whereas elsewhere, for obvious political reasons, emphasis is put on the Egyptian queen rather than on the renegade Roman. The most attractive solution to the dilemma is to assume that Horace did not write the poem as an allegory but contemporary readers may well have chosen to see an analogy (to use Heinze's more cautious word) between the two notorious mythical and historical pairs.[3]

Porphyrio stated that the ode was an imitation of Bacchylides. The original is lost, but this has not, of course, prevented some critics from speculating in detail about its character and content. The scholiast adds one detail which is highly significant and to which we shall return, that the prophecy was spoken by Cassandra. As for Alcaeus, there is obvious resemblance between the fragmentary

1 The most useful commentaries on the whole ode are in E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 188–192; R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book 1* (Oxford 1970) 188–201; H.P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz* v. 1 (Darmstadt 1972) 171–179.

2 Cf. S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (New Haven 1962) 218; D. West, *Horace Odes I* (Oxford 1995) 76–77.

3 Cf. A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Oden und Epoden*, 11th ed. (Berlin 1964) 76; L.P. Wilkinson, *Horace and His Lyric Poetry* 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1951) 68.

283 and parts of this ode, but it must remain uncertain whether this is simply because both poems deal with the same material or because the earlier one is the source of the other.[4]

Arguments that the ode shows signs of early composition are unreliable. The case was presented strongly by Fraenkel.[5] He congratulated Lachmann on his 'acute observation' that the trochaic basis in l.36 was proof of an unperfected skill. Fraenkel unaccountably ignored or overlooked a valuable contribution by Postgate who pointed out that in Homer Ἴλιον, Ἴλιος is commonly treated as beginning with a consonant because of the surviving influence of the obsolete digamma.[6] Horace, the most meticulous of metricians, probably noticed the anomaly and used it to flavour his Homeric allusions. Fraenkel goes on to claim that echoes of phrases in "one of the earliest of the epodes, the tenth" must indicate that the two poems were composed within a short space of time, but such similarities are not infrequent in the *Odes* and it would be hazardous to suppose a close temporal link in every case. Finally he points out that two words, *imperitare* (l.25) and *ecce* (l.27), do not occur elsewhere in the *Odes* and are therefore evidence that Horace's 'taste grew more fastidious' as he progressed. The verb is a rare word even in prose ("not in Cic. or Caes." in the dictionary of Lewis and Short) but it does occur once in the *Aeneid* (12.719) and, as for *ecce*, Virgil uses it nearly 50 times. Was he so much less sensitive than his friend?

These are small matters, but the attempt to fix an early date has encouraged adverse verdicts on the poem's quality, as was the case with Lachmann's influential judgment. The poem may have faults but they should not be attributed to an imagined tiro who had not yet mastered his craft.

The beginning of the ode is startling, 'When the herdsman dragged Helen away on Idaean ships . . . '. Instead of tending cattle in the fields this swain carried off across the sea the most notorious woman in legend. Some readers have objected that a herdsman drives and does not drag, but large animals were frequently conducted by means of a halter (*capistrum*) or headrope, in which case they had no choice but to go where they were led; the verb *traho*, however, implies a degree of violence.[7] *Pastor* is spat out pejoratively and followed by the

4 Cf. L. Alfonsi, *Aegyptus* 34 (1954) 215–219; L. Athanassaki, in M. Paschalis ed., *Horace and Greek Lyric Poetry* (Rethymnon 2002) 85–102; T. Oksala, *Religion und Mythologie bei Horaz* (Helsinki 1973) 126–127; Syndikus (above, n.1) 171–172.

5 Fraenkel (above, n.1) 191–192.

6 Cf. J.P. Postgate, *C.Q.* 16 (1922) 33: "Eleven times is it treated as if it began with a vowel, and fifty times as if it began with a consonant". This line has suffered more than it deserves from editorial tampering by means of obeli and conjectures (*Pergameas, Dardanias, Iliadas, barbaricas* – preferred by Housman according to L.P. Wilkinson).

7 Cf. e.g. Varro *Rust.* 2.6.4, Columella *Rust.* 6.2.3–4. Virgil shows cattle being led to sacrifice at *G.* 4.550–551: *quattuor eximios praestanti corpore tauros | ducit et intacta totidem cervice iuvencas*, and a human victim being brutally dragged away at *Aen.* 2.403–404: *ecce trahebatur passis Priameia virgo | crinibus a templo Cassandra adytisque Minervae.*

shocking conjunction *perfidus hospitam*.[8] The criminal has no name, and does not need one. In critic-speak this is called 'antonomasia', and in other contexts it can be an elegant device providing variety or even a piquant test of literary knowledge, but Horace was no Lycophron, playing a game of 'guess who'; for his audience this could hardly have been a riddle, and it must have instantly conveyed the identity and image of the central character.

The subject is Paris, but from l. 5 the speaker is Nereus, eldest son of the sea and therefore the most senior of several marine prophets. Nearly all editors print *Nereus* but the commentary of Porphyrio reads: *hac ode Bacchylidem imitatur, nam ut ille Cassandram facit vaticinari futura belli Troiani ita hic Proteum*. The scholiast's slip is understandable as Proteus was so well known from his spectacular role in a memorable episode in the *Odyssey* which was imitated by Virgil in the *Georgics*.[9] It is not surprising that Horace, in preference to Proteus, the noisome magician of metamorphosis with his malodorous flock, chose as his prophet Nereus, that most benevolent old man of the sea with his delightful family of charming daughters. In the *Theogony* (233–236) Hesiod (who does not mention Proteus) praised Nereus more highly than any other deity, citing his truthfulness, kindness and justice, and no more impressive authority could be imagined to speak a warning of the horrors to follow if this crime is committed. He speaks to Paris without compulsion or transformation: the contrast with the Proteus and Menelaus of the *Odyssey* could not be more marked. Moreover Nereus is personally involved in this case, being the father of Thetis, who plays a crucial part in the plot of the *Iliad*, and grandfather of Achilles.[10] As a seer presumably he realised that Helen's abduction might in the end lead to Achilles' death – death at the hands of Paris and Apollo.[11]

It is easy to account for Horace's choice of Nereus among the marine deities, but why did he want such a prophet in the first place? Why not follow his source and put the prophecy into the mouth of Cassandra? It is reasonable to surmise that he chose a sea-god because he could speak to Paris at the most dramatic point in the train of events – the moment when Paris was taking Helen on board ship. We do not know when or to whom Cassandra made her prophecy in the lost poem of Bacchylides, but as she was in Troy she cannot have addressed her brother at this critical juncture. Horace's Nereus appears at the very beginning of the elopement, which is also the very last moment when the crime could be checked and doom averted. This point is brought out most effectively by Syndikus in his admirable commentary; he suggests that the sudden stilling of the winds in the first stanza represents, as it were, Fate

8 Cf. Ov. *Her.* 5 (*Oenone Paridi*) 12 *servus eras, servo nubere nympha tuli*, and 79–80 *at cum pauper eras armentaque pastor agebas, | nulla nisi Oenone pauperis uxor erat.*

9 Homer *Od.* 4.384ff.; Verg. *G.* 4.387ff.

10 Cf. Hor. *Epod.* 17.8 *movit nepotem Telephus Nereium.*

11 Cf. F. Cairns, *AJP* 92 (1971) 449–451; K. Tomaszuk, *Eos* 80 (1992) 66.

holding its breath, allowing the sinner his last chance to turn back instead of sailing on to disaster.[12]

There is of course a paradox in prophecy: if the prophet is omniscient and therefore knows exactly what will happen, there is no point in his uttering what he knows will be vain forewarnings, unless he merely seeks the satisfaction of saying later, 'I told you so'. The paradox may however be resolved if the prophet reveals, not a known certainty, but a calculated probability; in such a case the seer possesses the foresight to judge accurately what is likely to happen rather than the supernatural perception of what will happen. Nereus's speech represents just such an estimate, a mixture of truth and likelihood, and it has a clear purpose: to prevent Paris from ruining himself and the people of Troy. He is giving infallible advice on the probable consequences, not an anticipative war report.

As the voyage begins, the winds are stilled by the god of the sea, and there is a strange calm like the hush that occurs in a theatre as the curtain rises. The poem is indeed like a play; we are not reading a narrative or listening to an epic recital; we are an audience with two characters on the stage before us.

Commentators have frequently claimed that the ode is unique in being 'an epic narrative', a 'reine Erzählung', but if it is seen rather as a dramatic scene, a miniature drama, it fits comfortably into a group of similar poems. An early example is *Epode* 13, which also contains a piece of Trojan myth and a speech including a prophecy. Among the *Odes*, in 1.7.21–32 we hear another hero from the same war addressing his comrades at a moment of crisis in their fortunes. 3.11 and 3.27 present scenes and speeches from other myths. 3.3.15–68 reveals the gods debating in Olympus. 2.13 offers a vision of the underworld. 1.37 shows the spectacular end of Cleopatra. 3.5.13–56 exhibits a memorable incident of earlier Roman history. And then there are scenes more reminiscent of the comic stage displaying parties (1.27, 3.19) or troubled lovers (1.25, 3.7, 3.9, 3.20). Sometimes the dramatic action has an introduction, sometimes we are plunged *in medias res* and we have to work out the situation quickly for ourselves. The variety is remarkable but the underlying pattern is obvious.

Now to resume our seats in Horace's private theatre hearing Nereus, the protagonist, as he addresses Paris, an actor who does not speak but whose listening presence is vital to the effect of the scene. A dynamic tension is created by the fact that what Paris may be expected to understand and what we understand are not the same, for our point of view and our background knowledge are very different from his. Paris, we assume, knows only what Nereus tells him, whereas we, like Horace himself, have read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and more besides, and we know a great deal about the Greek heroes of the Trojan war. Of course, if Paris were the archetypal craven coward, as many commentators would have him, there would be no need of powerful divine rhetoric to scare him off, but it is a great mistake to dismiss him as a worthless poltroon. He is in fact an authentic

12 Syndikus (above, n.1) 172.

Homeric hero, as his more commonly used name Alexandros indicates. He is indeed arrogant, boastful, and vain, but he is still a formidable warrior and, at least at times, a brave man, as even Hector acknowledges (*Il.* 6.520 ff.). His war record is by no means despicable: he kills three opponents and wounds three, including Diomedes, whom he puts out of the battle for a time; he also kills Nestor's trace-horse, so that the king of Pylos has to be rescued from the field. The woundings of Machaon and Eurypalus have momentous consequences in the development of the story as their withdrawal attracts the attention of Achilles and ultimately leads to the fatal intervention of Patroclus.[13] And in the end Paris is the hero who will kill Achilles (with the help of Apollo), as Hector predicts when he is dying (*Il.* 22.358–360).

As for retreat in fear of death, that is a frequent event; it is not in itself a proof of cowardice but a realistic element in Homeric warfare; the warrior who never turns tail and runs is likely to be a corpse before nightfall, and even the mightiest heroes have the sense to give way on occasion. On the Greek side, for example, may be listed Aias, Antilochus, Diomedes, Idomeneus, Menelaus, Patroclus, and even Achilles (admittedly in fear of a river rather than a human adversary). Trojans who flee include Aeneas, Hector, and Helenus. Whole armies, Greek and Trojan, at times do likewise. In fact Paris's only failure of nerve in the epic is when, in response to his own bold challenge, Menelaus advances on him like a lion (*Il.* 3.15–37), and this is the episode that everyone remembers so well. But it is to the credit of this 'coward' that he proposed the duel in the first place and, after he has been severely scolded by his brother Hector, he goes through with it. When he is beaten, he does not run away, but is snatched from the field by Aphrodite, and he thereby in a sense gains rather than loses kudos as he joins the special class of outstanding heroes who are saved in this way by divine intervention.[14]

This defence of Paris is offered, not in order to make him out to be better than he is, but to emphasise his heroic stature and to point out that he is not a faint-hearted weakling who will give in easily to threats. To persuade such a bold, headstrong, swaggering character Nereus will need all his powers, and it is this severe test that gives tension to the drama presented by Horace.

When Nereus speaks, it quickly becomes clear that he is not simply foretelling the future, but is making a desperate personal appeal to Paris, urging him to think again about the action he is taking and warning him of the likely consequences: 'YOU' he cries sixteen times (in verb forms and pronouns), His first words are extremely ill-omened as he predicts that Helen's recovery will be sought by a confederate army of the whole of Greece which will

13 Paris kills: Menesthius *Il.* 7.8ff.; Nestor's trace-horse 8.80ff.; Euchenor 13.660ff.; Deiochus 15.341f. He wounds: Diomedes 11.369ff.; Machaon 11.504ff.; Eurypalus 11.581ff.

14 There are other divine rescues of this kind (which strangely are restricted to Trojans): Idaios by Hephaestus 5.20ff.; Aeneas by Aphrodite 5.311ff., by Apollo 5.344 and 431ff., by Poseidon 20.288ff.; Agenor by Apollo 21.595ff.; Hector by Athene and Apollo 20.438ff. Cf. the rescue of Sarpedon's corpse by Zeus 16.666ff.

destroy both Paris's marriage and his homeland, and then in the third stanza he makes an unmistakable allusion to a source which is as well known to us as it was to Horace – the *Iliad*. By what is virtually a quotation from *Il.* 2.388 ff. our attention is drawn to that part of the epic; the subsequent description of Athene arming for war alludes to a nearby passage (446–451; cf. 5.733ff.); and nearly all the Homeric references in the remainder of the ode are based on the earlier part of the *Iliad* (Books 2 to 5). We could have found plenty of evidence in his work showing that Horace was familiar with Homer apart from his own explicit statement in *Epist.* 1.2. It is not necessary to suppose that, in composing this ode, Horace had in mind any other account of the war than the *Iliad*.

The fourth stanza reminds us of the complacent boudoir hero we have read about in the *Iliad*, but from l.16 to the end of the poem the prophet's message is directed at Paris, warning him of the grim hazards and dangerous opponents that threaten him and of the terrible final consequences of the war he will cause. In this struggle his patron goddess will be no protection; in the end his well-combed hair will be tumbled in the dust – a fearful image for a man as vain as he; however hard he tries, he will not be able to avoid spears, arrows, battle-din, and pursuit. He will encounter seven named warriors. Even if he has never heard of this Ajax (the Locrian Ajax), he now learns that he is a fast runner, which must strike dread in the heart of a man who may make a brave show but who is quick to withdraw or flee. The son of Laertes represents destruction to his race and Pylian Nestor is joined with him. Salaminian Teucer and Sthenelus are ready to harry him; both are fearless and the latter is an expert in battle, especially as a controller of horses and charioteer, which is most alarming for a Trojan, for the Trojans relied on chariots even more than the Greeks. And there is this mysterious Meriones, whose powers he will have to discover later. Finally the son of Tydeus is presented to him, a savage man, mightier than his father, who is already raging to find him and who will run him down to the last gasp like a wolf chasing a stag. From Paris's point of view there may not be a great deal of detail in the ponderous list of enemies he will face but there should be enough to terrify him. We well-read spectators, in our privileged front seats, can easily recall the individual qualities and performance of these heroes as we hear their famous names.

But why did Horace (or his model, if he was following one closely) choose these seven heroes to represent the whole confederate army of the Greeks? While it is understandable that critics are reluctant to ask a question to which they are unable to give a confident answer, it is strange that this one has so rarely been raised. There are indeed suggestions that the seven were hardly the best team to put in the field. For example, Heinze writes this note on l.23: "Den Helden zweiten Rangs tritt Paris gegenüber, wenngleich er auch hier den kürzeren zieht." More surprisingly Syndikus remarks, "Mit Absicht werden in den Versen 21ff. auch Namen weniger gefährlicher griechischer Kämpfer genannt;

es soll der Eindruck entstehen, dass Paris vor jedem und allen davonläuft . . .'[15] One suspects that what has led to these misjudgments is the absence of certain preeminent leaders, and for this curious exclusion some explanation must be found. One commentator who did point to the most striking omission was Sinko: Etenim inter belli Troiani duces Agamemnon et Menelaus absentia nitent.[16] He proposed a solution to the problem, which was that Horace based his selection on a source which used a catalogue of Helen's suitors who swore to avenge her abduction; Agamemnon was excluded because he was not a suitor on his own account (he acted on behalf of his brother), while Menelaus as the offended husband was in a separate category; thus both the *Atridae* were left out of the list. This is ingenious, but one obvious objection is that what Horace wrote was hardly likely to have been dictated to him by what he read in some obscure inventory in a synopsis of mythology; he must have had his own reasons for choosing the names he included in his poem.

There is a simpler explanation for the absence of the *Atridae*. In a scene based on the *Iliad* presented to an audience familiar with the epic there were drawbacks to including the pair in the group of warriors who are to intimidate Paris. The outraged husband Menelaus suffers from an insuperable disadvantage: all of us who are familiar with the epic are aware that at the start of the action he has a duel with Paris which has for him a very unsatisfactory outcome. Menelaus was undoubtedly superior in the field, but Paris, although he lost his dignity and his helmet, escaped with the aid of Venus and was carried away unharmed to his marital bedroom. Telling the truth about this encounter would hardly add to the persuasive power of Nereus' warning.[17] Agamemnon, for all his authority and grandeur, appears in the early part of the *Iliad* as a deeply flawed leader who makes a crucial mistake in arousing the wrath of Achilles and then commits blunders which nearly bring disaster on the expedition. At times he seems more of a threat to his own side than to the enemy. In short, the less the audience is reminded of the *Atridae* the better: there were plenty of bigger bogymen with which to scare Paris. Another great Greek warrior appears for the moment to have been left out – Achilles. But Achilles was out of the action for the greater part of the *Iliad*, and his decisive entry is reserved for the end of the ode.

To return to Horace's list and its source: he has already pointed the way by referring to passages in the early part of the *Iliad*. In Book 2.402ff. Agamemnon summons a council of six chieftains: Nestor, Idomeneus, Telamonian Ajax, Locrian Ajax, Diomedes, and Odysseus; Menelaus joins in *automatos* to make

15 Heinze (above, n.3) 79; Syndikus (above, n.1) 177.

16 T. Sinko, *Eos* 29 (1926) 135–155, esp. 146ff.

17 Heinze (above, n.3) in his note on *ll.* 27–32 suggests that Menelaus was omitted and replaced by Diomedes because his heroic status was tarnished in later poetry, especially in Euripides, but it is not necessary to leave the Iliad and seek an explanation elsewhere. Oksala (above, n. 4) 126 pointed out that, on the allegorical interpretation, Octavian would be better represented by the hero Diomedes than the cuckold Menelaus.

the number up to seven. So both in Homer and in Horace there are seven heroes, but they are not the same seven. Four are common to both lists: Nestor, Ajax son of Oileus, Diomedes, Odysseus. Three of the Homeric council lose their seats: Idomeneus, Telamonian Ajax, and Menelaus. The replacements are: Teucer, Sthenelus, and Meriones, all of them mighty men of battle, by no means 'Statisten' or second-raters. If, as suggested, Horace adapted the list from Homer, why did he make these changes?

In the cases of Ajax and Teucer the answers are not far to seek. In a short list two Ajaxes would cause an imbalance, and in selecting one of the pair the choice was clear. To a man who prefers to fight at a distance with the bow and who is liable to run away the fleet-footed Locrian was a much greater threat than his stolid namesake, for whom the obvious substitute was his brother Teucer. Teucer had another qualification which made him an ideal opponent for Paris – he was a wonderful archer, the best bowman among the Greeks.[18] Paris himself was an archer, so he knew very well how deadly *calami spicula Cnosii* could be. Horace does not trouble to mention Teucer's special skill, for this is an ode not an epic, but we in the audience know, and we may even remember that Paris is to die from a bowshot, though that is outside the *Iliad* as we have it. Sthenelus, who takes the place of Menelaus, is sometimes dismissed by the critics as an unimportant character. It is true that he does not play a prominent part in the *Iliad*, but Agamemnon chose him in his council of six, and when he does appear in the field in Books 4 and 5 he is indispensable to Diomedes.[19] As Horace is at pains to emphasise (ll.24–26), he has exceptional skill in the control of horses, as demonstrated in his handling of the marvellous horses of Aeneas in *Il.* 5.241–273 and 318–330. From Paris's point of view the prospect of being chased by a superb charioteer is bound to be extremely alarming.

Then there is Meriones in the place of Idomeneus. These two were the leaders of the Cretan contingent, Idomeneus being senior to his nephew; they are frequently shown fighting together, and in one place they are likened to Ares and his son Phobos[20]. They are equally successful in battle but Meriones is the more versatile, for as well as being a great spearman, he is a fast runner, a charioteer, and so good a bowman that he excels Teucer in the Games, and it may that Horace preferred him to Idomeneus because he represented a multiple threat. He is the only hero who enters for three competitions (chariot, bow, and spear). He certainly would have been a fearsome opponent for Paris to meet.[21]

18 Cf. *Il.* 13.313–314, Hor. *Carm.* 4.9.17–18.

19 Both Diomedes and Sthenelus were members of the Epigoni who captured Thebes and were on that account better than their fathers, as Sthenelus claims in *Il.* 4.405–410.

20 *Il.* 13.298. Cf. the formular description of Meriones which occurs four times in the *Iliad*: Μηριόνης ἀτάλαντος Ἐνυαλίῳ ἀνδρειφόντῃ.

21 The name Idomeneus presented difficulties in this metre, which may have been a factor in the choice between the two Cretans.

Of the seven Greek heroes who may threaten Paris the most fearsomely imagined is Diomedes (ll.27–32). There are good reasons for this choice. As a killer on the battlefield he takes third place after Patroclus and Achilles, but because of the Quarrel they are not available in the earlier stages of the fighting. The Homeric allusions in the ode are based on the first quarter of the epic, and in this section the most spectacular warrior is Diomedes, whose wonderful exploits are narrated in Book 5.

On this analysis the team of champions which Horace assembles to frighten Paris seems an impressive selection, and in describing them he provides a subtle blend of specific warning for Paris's ears and reminders for the audience who, because of their greater knowledge, can fill in the gaps. It would have overburdened his text to give more details of Odysseus, Nestor, and Meriones; we know without being told what formidable foes they are.

In another way the seven warriors are well chosen to represent the whole Achaean army. In terms of their geographical origin the spread is wide: Odysseus – North West, Ajax – North East, Nestor – West, Teucer – East, Meriones – South, Diomedes and Sthenelus – Centre (Argos). This is not to suggest that they were selected on a local basis; it is simply that the scatter corresponds to the breadth of the great alliance. It is possible that Horace was conscious of this incidental feature and for that reason employed the conventional geographical epithets *Pylius* and *Salaminius* (ll.22–23) which in themselves seem rather dull. It has often been remarked that Horace has a fondness for place names, but this is also a feature of the Homeric poems, where a hero's origin is commonly included in his description.

What is remarkable about these potential opponents is that most of the threatened encounters did not actually occur in the *Iliad*.[22] Paris did not have to elude fleet-footed Ajax; he did not need to take account of Odysseus, destroyer of his people; he was not harried by the many-skilled Teucer and Sthenelus expert in fighting on foot or from a chariot; he never made the grim acquaintance of Meriones. Above all, he was never hunted to exhaustion by a wolfish Diomedes. He did indeed come into conflict with Nestor and Diomedes, but in fact he worsted both of them. He killed Nestor's trace-horse so that the king of Pylos had to be rescued by Diomedes (8.80ff.), and he wounded Diomedes with an arrow. It was but a scratch, said Diomedes, but it forced him to leave the battlefield, if only temporarily (11.369ff.). One possible explanation for this extraordinary discrepancy between the ode and the epic would be to suppose that Horace derived his catalogue from some other authority than Homer. But the first part of the ode is clearly based on a portion of the *Iliad*, and it is unnecessary to imagine another source if it is appreciated that Nereus's threats are not revelations of the future but only exemplary deterrents. In the context these

22 This remarkable fact is rarely noticed by commentators. One who does mention it, but only cursorily, is M. Lowrie, *Horace's Narrative Odes* (Oxford 1997) 133.

fanciful encounters are made specious by being embedded between the authentic prophecies given in ll.5–15 and 33–36. It must be recognised that Nereus is not offering a precis of the *Iliad* but describing the kind of dangerous opponents Paris is likely to meet if he inaugurates a war. Alas, his addressee was deaf; he was far too headstrong to listen to reason, and he probably had no more faith in prophets and omens than his brother Hector.[23]

Nereus's passionate plea must fail, and we in the audience know that his central message will be fulfilled in the dreadful end so neatly encapsulated in the final stanza, where Achilles, the mightiest of Greek warriors, hitherto kept in reserve, comes into action. If Paris had listened to Nereus, he would have turned his ships back to port before he reached Cranae and claimed that he had done no more than obligingly take his hostess for a yachting trip on an unusually calm sea. Then the Trojan war would not have taken place, Homer would have had to sing other songs, and Greek mythology would have been deprived of its most colourful and enduring cycle.

This ode has often been criticised because, unlike most of the poems in the collection, it does not relate to Horace's life or circumstances, and this apparent lack of allusion to his own world has been used to support the claim that it is an allegory in which Paris and Helen represent Antony and Cleopatra. Rejection of this theory does not mean that the poem is merely an exercise in rhetorical discourse without any reference to reality. It has in fact a universal reference which is still valid in our own day, for Nereus is not simply a mythical merman; he is the protopype of innumerable far-seeing advisers whose arguments have failed to dissuade arrogant, over-confident, vain men from starting disastrous wars without regard for the terrible consequences.

Correspondence:
Arnold Bradshaw
32 Gilbert Road
UK-Cambridge CB4 3PE

23 See *Il.* 12.210ff., where Hector rejects the advice of Polydamas and pours scorn on omens, and 18.249ff., where he again treats the same seer's warning with contempt.