Where Is Caesar? The Removal of Octavian in *Satires* 1 and the *Epodes*

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WHERE IS CAESAR? THE REMOVAL OF OCTAVIAN IN *SATIRES* 1 AND THE *EPODES*

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Abstract: This article enquires into the not-quite-thereness of Octavian in Horace's early poetry. It argues that Octavian's poetic peripherality leading up to Actium is not incidental, but the result of a persistent and careful process of removal. By placing Octavian just beyond the poem's reach, Horace dissociates Octavian from civil-war politics while emphasizing his extraordinary political status. This careful articulation of Octavian's removedness generates two effects. On the one hand, it absolves Octavian of his responsibility in plunging Rome into civil war. On the other hand, it directs the reader's gaze to his increasingly unreachable and indefinable political position.

In the third poem of book 1 of Horace's *Satires* (c.36/35 b.c.e.),[1] the poet takes aim at the Sardinian singer Tigellius, accusing him of refusing to perform upon request: not even Caesar, the future Augustus, could get a tune out of him (1.3.4–6):

> Caesar, qui cogere posset,
> si peteret per amicitiam patris atque suam, non
> quicquam proficeret; . . .
>
> If Caesar, who could just compel him, asked in the name of his own friendship and his father's, he would not get anything . . .

This is the sole mention of Octavian Caesar in *Satires* 1: a brief cameo and he's gone.[2] Yet, as one commentary points out, his appearance is a

[1] For further discussion of the date of *Satires* 1, see Gowers (2012, 1–5).

[2] Octavian's presence is hinted at elsewhere in *Satires* 1. For example, the oblique focus on the expulsion of kings from Rome at *Satires* 1.7.33–5 (and particularly the words, *per magnos . . . deos*, 1.7.33) brings to mind the assassination and deification of Octavian's father by posthumous adoption, Julius Caesar; see Dufallo (2015, 328–9). There is also the passing reference to the *horti Caesaris* at *Satires* 1.9.18, and the teasing presence of the poet

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rather ominous one.[3] The conspicuously positioned phrase, *qui cogere posset* (1.3.4), implies that if Octavian fails to achieve what he wished through conventional means (cf. *per amicitiam*, 1.3.5), he can get things done by less charming methods. The force that the triumvir has at his disposal clearly suggests that a request from him is a different proposition compared to a request from anybody else.[4] Far from being an ordinary *amicus* within Tigellius' social circle, Octavian's presumed authority and his political pedigree as the adoptive son of a former dictator (cf. *patris*, 1.3.5) make him a powerful outsider. What exactly Octavian *is* capable of, however, is kept out of sight by the poet. In fact, Horace presents the interaction between Octavian and Tigellius as an entirely imaginary scenario (cf. *Caesar . . . | si peteret*). Even though his power and status loom large, Caesar never *actually* appears in the poem's action.

This article enquires into the not-quite-thereness of Octavian in Horace's early poetry. Octavian's presence is not in the foreground of Horatian poetry until we reach *Epode* 9, which is set dramatically in the immediate aftermath of Actium.[5] Prior to this poetic moment, readers only get glimpses of the triumvir in *Satires* 1.3 (as seen above) and in *Epode* 1; otherwise, he is simply not mentioned at all—even in poems where one might expect his appearance, for example in *Satires* 1.5 and *Epode* 4, which are set against the backdrop of contemporary political events in which Octavian played a major part. This article suggests that Octavian's peripherality in Horace's poetry leading up to the showdown at Actium is not incidental, but the result of a persistent and careful process of removal.[6] By writing Octavian out of the action, or by placing

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Octavius Musa at *Satires* 1.10.82 (see Feeney 2002, 174). But only in *Satires* 1.3 is Octavian mentioned by name.

[3] Gowers (2012) *ad loc.*

[4] Griffin (1984, 191).

[5] Internal evidence from the *Epodes* points to a compositional period between 42 B.C.E. and 30 B.C.E. *Epode* 9 appears to be one of the latest poems (if not *the* latest poem) of the collection. The dates of composition for individual poems are discussed in the introductory essays of the commentaries of Mankin (1995) and Watson (2003); see also Carrubba (1969, 3).

[6] In using the battle of Actium as a temporal anchor for my reading of Horace's poetry, a strong sense of chronological progression will emerge, especially in the case of the *Epodes*. However, I do not wish to contend that poems such as *Epodes* 1 and 4, which have a "pre-Actium" dramatic date, can only be read from this temporal perspective. Their appearance in the unified collection published after Actium clearly allows them to be read from what Kraggerud (1984, 44–65) calls a *Doppelperspektive*—that is, as documents of their own time *and* from a post-Actian viewpoint. Indeed, I hope to show that the virtual absence of Octavian in these "pre-Actium" *Epodes* becomes all the more salient when we read them with the knowledge of his eventual victory in mind.

him just beyond the reach of the poem, Horace not only minimizes Octavian's involvement in the volatile politics of the triumviral period, but also positions him as someone who operates at a level above and beyond the ordinary—that is, the scurrilous but politically inconsequential quotidian social interactions that make up the majority of Horace's satirical and iambic poetry.[7] This careful articulation of Octavian's removedness generates two effects. On the one hand, it serves to absolve the triumvir of his responsibility in plunging Rome into civil war; on the other hand, it draws attention to the increasing difficulty of trying to contain Octavian within the established socio-political frameworks of Republican Rome. Horace's removal of the triumvir from the immediate world of his poetry thus protectively distances Octavian from Rome's topsy-turvy politics. But by persistently depicting Octavian as always somewhat removed from the realm of other men, the poet also directs the reader's gaze to the unreachable and indefinable position of the triumvir, hinting at the ways in which the new Caesar will stand outside of the usual confines of Roman public life.

Previous studies on Horace's treatment of Octavian in his early poetry have illuminated the ways in which the poet tactfully downplays Octavian's political authority and reframes his role in the triumviral power struggle in disarming terms. For example, Dufallo has shown that the narrators of *Satires* 1 routinely "demystify" Octavian's associations to Julius Caesar as a way of making his power seem affable, familiar, and thus desirable.[8] Earlier works on Horace's handling of politically sensitive terms such as *amicitia* and *libertas* have highlighted that the poet's selective presentation of these terms worked not only to conceal the rising political tension between the triumvirs, but even turned these terms into qualities to be identified with the Octavianic cause.[9] In these

[7] Of course, one might say that the reason for Octavian's removedness is that he is simply too far up the political hierarchy to be squarely visible in such "low" forms of verse. However, I wish to make the case that Octavian's near-absence in these poems is not merely a reflection of his "generic" incompatibility.

[8] Dufallo (2015). His main argument is that the demystification of Octavian's political authority in *Satires* 1 sends out the reassuring message that the Octavianic circle understood what kind of relationship the people wanted to have with political power.

[9] Kennedy (1992, 30–4) has shown that in the *Satires* Horace presented the term *libertas* in such a way—including domesticating its political dimensions and recuperating its more reassuring connotations—that the term no longer belonged to a discourse antagonistic to Octavian, but became instead synonymous with his campaign. On the concealment of inequality in the notion of *amicitia*, see especially White (1993, 29); also Hunter (1985, 486–90) and Gowers (2012, 4–5).

studies, Horace's skilful manipulation of the presence and approachability of Octavian in the social exchange of triumviral Rome is understood to serve an ideological function of neutralizing the public image of the new Caesar.

The present article, while building on these studies, attempts a different path in its interpretation of the shifting presence of Octavian in *Satires* 1 and the *Epodes*. Rather than seeing Octavian's virtual absence in Horace's triumviral-era poetry as a passive fact and dwelling on how the poet subtly carves out a positive image of Octavian through indirect means, I take Octavian's absence to be a meaningful point of departure for the interpretation of these poems. In a recent volume entitled *Unspoken Rome*, Geue and Giusti quite rightly suggest that absence can function as a "'generative' force" for the hermeneutics of Latin literature.[10] Latin literature's sensitivity to politics, as they note, leaves it ripe for all kinds of repression, thus making absence—and allusions to absence—particularly rich for political reading.[11] Indeed, in recent decades there has been a growing focus on absences and silences in the literature of the late Republican and Augustan periods. In *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*, Hardie has argued that the Ovidian world is often brought to life by conjuring up things and figures that are not there.[12] For Kraus, the deployment of silence in Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* is just as important as the use of speech in the author's attempt to create and enhance vividness.[13] Most pertinently perhaps, Geue has shown that Augustus himself utilized the absence of his name on certain monuments (cf. *sine ulla inscriptione nominis mei*, Aug. *R.G.* 20) to underline that his agency was "truly all-encompassing."[14] Methodologically, the present study places itself among this growing body of scholarship that strives to identify and attribute (political) significance to absences or, better, absent presences.

In making this interpretive move, this article also aims to recuperate some of the more apprehensive aspects of Horace's unfolding presentation of the successor of Julius Caesar. In particular, I want to show that the removedness of the *Divi filius* from the poetic world of *Satires* 1 manifests

[10] Geue and Giusti (2021, 3).

[11] Geue and Giusti (2021, 4). I thank the two editors for showing me an early copy of their work during the formative stage of this article.

[12] Hardie (2002).

[13] Kraus (2010). See also Stevens (2013) on the polyvalence of silence in Catullus' poetry. I thank the anonymous reader for drawing my attention to these important bibliographical items.

[14] Geue (2019, 36).

itself as a widening and eventually unbridgeable gulf between Octavian and other men in the *Epodes*, to the extent that the relationship between the new Caesar and those around him—including and especially the poet himself—is ultimately framed as one between divine and human.[15] In the case of *Epode* 9, I argue that the poem's divinizing imagery, which intensifies the sense that the person of Octavian is somewhat removed from the fabric of the poem, conveys Horace's attempt to work out and critique what Octavian's unparalleled status after Actium would mean for Rome. While previous studies have well identified that *Epode* 9 is infused with an anxiety about Rome's post-war mood (and that the various kinds of anxieties exhibited by the narrator of the *Epodes* is a central motif of the collection),[16] my reading will illuminate the way in which divinizing imagery and insinuations of absence play upon each other in *Epode* 9 to spark off the idea that the new Caesar can no longer be conceptualized or contained within the political conventions of Republican Rome. By thus turning Octavian's unreachability from a kind of social absence into a godlike status, Horace's triumviral-era poetry not only hints at Rome's shift toward a new political order, but also encapsulates the sense of knowing that one is being kept far from the forces effecting political change.

1. THE ABSENT FRIEND

The impression that Octavian is far from being immersed in the ordinary political ecosystem is a central theme in *Satires* 1.5. This poem alludes to the fragile entente between Octavian and Antony, and it affords an insightful glimpse into Octavian's influence in the politically fraught period of the triumvirate.[17] The poem recounts Horace's journey from Rome to Brundisium, during which he joins Maecenas, Cocceius, and Fonteius Capito, who are travelling on a diplomatic mission to negotiate

[15] In this respect, my work expands on Dufallo (2015) and suggests that Horace's demystification of Octavian's authority does not extend to the *Epodes*: rather the poet chooses to re-sacralize it in the *Epodes*.

[16] On *Epode* 9's anxiety about how to celebrate a civil war victory, see, e.g., Mankin (1995, 159–60, 171 [on 9.21–6] and 181 [on 9.37]). On anxiety and impotence as major themes in the *Epodes*, see esp. Fitzgerald (1988) and Oliensis (1991).

[17] Scholars have long emphasized that the partisan politics of the triumviral era are instrumental to understanding the social reality of *Satires* 1, even if readers only get the merest signs of the dominant political subjects of the time. See, e.g., Du Quesnay (1984); Kennedy (1992); Henderson (1993) and (1994); Oliensis (1997); Cucchiarelli (2001, 84–118); Miller (2009, 40–4).

what appears to be a peace treaty, most likely the Treaty of Tarentum (37 B.C.E.).[18] Octavian never actually emerges in the poem, but the way in which Horace pointedly denies his readers the presence of Octavian only adds to the sense that the triumvir occupies a place in society far beyond normal people's reach (1.5.27–33):

> huc venturus erat Maecenas optimus atque
> Cocceius, missi magnis de rebus uterque
> legati, aversos soliti componere amicos.
> hic oculis ego nigra meis collyria lippus
> illinere. interea Maecenas advenit atque
> Cocceius Capitoque simul Fonteius, ad unguem
> factus homo, Antoni, non ut magis alter, amicus.
>
> Here Maecenas—most excellent man—and Cocceius were to come, each of them despatched as ambassadors on some big business, well accustomed as they are to reconciling estranged friends. Here I smear some black ointment on my eyes for my conjunctivitis. In the meantime, Maecenas arrived, and so did Cocceius, together with Fonteius Capito, a character of tailored perfection, second to none in his friendship to Antony.

A tense political standoff between two major rivals is conceived of as a dispute amongst friends (*aversos . . . amicos*, 1.5.29).[19] Yet Horace *still* refuses our access—and even claims his own lack of access—to what goes on beyond the scenes:[20] only the *optimus* (1.5.27) can possibly effect a change in the current situation, while the poet—applying ointment on his infected eyes just as the delegation is about to arrive (1.5.30–1)—literally cannot see or do anything.[21] The eventual appearance of Antony's name (1.5.33) provides the identity of only one of the *amici*, but Octavian remains anonymous throughout, kept invisible in the world of "big business" (*magnis . . . rebus*, 1.5.28). Horace twice teases the reader with the

[18] For further discussion and bibliography on the plausibility of the Treaty of Tarentum, see Gowers (2012, 183); also Brown (1993, 139).

[19] Du Quesnay (1984, 40–1): "The last phrase [of verse 29] is a masterpiece of understatement." See also Gowers (2012, 4–5).

[20] Freudenburg (2001, 8 and 55) observes that throughout *Satires* 1.5 Horace refuses to take us anywhere close to Maecenas, and that our desire to know more is a game played on us from beginning to end.

[21] The sudden and comical application of conjunctivitis medicine by the poet has been interpreted by Cucchiarelli (2001, 70) as a "physiology of *recusatio*."

seemingly imminent arrival of Octavian with enjambments at lines 27–8 and 31–2 (cf. *Maecenas optimus atque | Cocceius . . . Maecenas advenit atque | Cocceius*);[22] but the comically deflating appearance of Cocceius is only half of the story. As these lines build up to the dramatic epiphany of the only person who might trump "the best" (*optimus*, 1.5.27),[23] Octavian's no-show underscores just how far he lies beyond the grasp of the ordinary.[24]

In her commentary on the poem, Gowers draws our attention to the way *Satires* 1.5 "frame[s] world events in disarmingly domestic terms."[25] Indeed, as Kennedy points out, it is precisely the poems which present themselves as "apolitical" that are the most actively political, since their superficial apoliticality allows power to be accumulated and exercised beyond the notice of those involved.[26] Through this kind of de-politicized and disarming rhetoric, the poet thus quietly presents Octavian's unreachable, powerful status—the precise nature of which remains elusive—as an intimate social reality which men like Horace accept without being able to do anything about it. In fact, the poet's self-presentation as one who is laughably unable to participate in the business of negotiation palpably hints at the loss of individual civic agency in an era dominated by military generals. The whimsical de-escalation of political tension in *Satires* 1.5 creates the impression of "(big) business as usual"; and the removal of Octavian from the poem reinforces the idea that civil strife is some vague notion in the far-off distance. At the same time, however, by depicting himself as being only ever in the shadows of a different, more remote world, Horace identifies politics—the very thing which determines lives—as the preserve of an intangible few, amongst whom the readers detect a silhouette in the shape of Octavian.

[22] Note that Appian also begins his narrative of the Treaty of Tarentum with Antony waiting expectantly for Octavian to arrive (*BCiv.* 5.10.93). I thank the anonymous reader for drawing my attention to this important point of parallel.

[23] *Optimus* does not have be taken with *Maecenas*, even if it is frequently understood to describe Horace's patron in affectionate terms; see Gowers (2012) and Brown (1993) *ad locc*.

[24] Additionally, Ehlers (1985, 71), Cucchiarelli (2001, 68), and Freudenburg (2001, 53) note that the mirroring phrasing of *huc . . . Maecenas* (1.5.27) and *hic . . . ego* (1.5.30) underscores the contrast between the importance of the delegates' mission and the triviality of Horace's personal experience.

[25] Gowers (2012, 5).

[26] Kennedy (1992, 31–5).

2. THE ABSENT GENERAL

The way in which Horace adumbrates Octavian's unreachable superiority by pointedly leaving him out of a poem can also be observed in *Epode* 4, which has a dramatic date close to that of *Satires* 1.5. Set in a time shortly before Octavian's campaign against Sextus Pompey in 36 B.C.E.,[27] *Epode* 4 aims its invective at an apparently objectionable upstart who has risen from a freedman to the rank of *tribunus militum* serving in Octavian's army. Octavian makes no appearance in the poem at all, but his presence can be inferred from the final four verses, which depict the contempt that the people in the street felt toward this upstart's elevation to a position of power within Octavian's camp (*Epod.* 4.17–20). As Watson points out, this scene subtly shines a positive light on the triumvir: by ventriloquising the Roman citizens' perception that Octavian should have no truck with the likes of this repugnant upstart, Horace implicitly asserts Octavian as the nobler cause in the war against Sextus.[28] Watson's accurate assessment of *Epode* 4 as an indirect endorsement of Octavian's faction laced with anti-Sextan propaganda forms the basis of my reading of the poem. But I wish to suggest further that *Epode* 4 does not stop at lending Octavian a subtly supportive voice at a tense political moment. By removing Octavian from the poem altogether, Horace creates a distance between the triumvir and those involved in the murky business of civil war, which in turn allows the poet to insinuate that there is a fundamental distinction between Octavian—the successor of Julius Caesar, the *Divi filius*—and those who are jostling for power and status in a volatile and disorderly society.[29]

The justification for this reading can be found in the poem's opening, in which Horace emphatically lays out the irreconcilability between him and the upstart (*Epod.* 4.1–6):

> Lupis et agnis quanta sortito obtigit,
> tecum mihi discordia est,
> Hibericis peruste funibus latus

[27] *Contra* Mankin (1995, 99), who suggests that, based on the position of *Epode* 4 in the collection, its dramatic date should be pre-Actium, rather than pre-Naulochus (the commonly accepted dramatic date for the poem).

[28] Watson (2002, 219–20) and (2007, 97).

[29] Many studies have noted that the chaotic uncertainty of the 30s permeates the *Epodes*: see for example Nisbet (1984); Fitzgerald (1988, 177, 183); Watson (2003, 149) and (2007, 97).

et crura dura compede.
licet superbus ambules pecunia,
fortuna non mutat genus.

Great is the enmity assigned by Nature to wolves and lambs; no less is that between me and you—you with your flanks scarred by Spanish ropes, and legs by iron fetters; you may strut about as proudly as you like on account of your money—but fortune does not alter breeding.

Horace's hatred of his enemy ultimately comes down to the man's supposed low birth (*genus*, 4.6) and good luck (*fortuna*, 4.6).[30] Embedded in the poet's bitter attack on the upstart's rise in society is an emphasis on the fixed nature of certain things. The passage begins with an age-old proverbial opposition found in the animal kingdom (4.1); this is followed by a reminder of the upstart's indelible past as a slave (4.3–4); and the verbal attack continues with Horace asserting the immutability of one's birth-rank (4.5). Cumulatively, these poetic images insist that there is a natural order of things that cannot be altered by circumstance. Furthermore, as the lexicon of animal species in the opening line (*Lupis et agnis*, 4.1) morphs into the language of class distinction five lines later (*genus*, 4.6),[31] Horace symbolically stratifies political classes into different *genera*, allowing the polysemy of the word *genus* to insinuate that the difference between him and the upstart is like that between human and animal. The upstart may perceive that he has soared above his rank, but Horace rejects not only the validity, but even the possibility, of his elevation. In its venting of a vitriolic contempt for the upstart, the opening of *Epode* 4 enshrines true elevation as something unaffected by the turns of *fortuna* and beyond the reach of certain men.

This exclusionary act affects how we might construe Octavian's non-appearance at the end of the poem, where, as mentioned above, Horace depicts passers-by showing their disdain at the upstart's enlistment in Octavian's army (4.17–20):

quid attinet tot ora navium gravi
rostrata duci pondere
contra latrones atque servilem manum
hoc, hoc tribuno militum?

[30] Mankin (1995, 110).

[31] *Genus* can of course also denote the species of animals (*OLD* s.v. 6a). Note also the correspondence between *sortito* ("by lot") in line 1 and *fortuna* in line 6.

> What's the point of sending so many ships' bows beaked with heavy rams against a rabble of pirates and slaves, when this man—yes, this one here—is a senior officer?

Just as the conflict between Octavian and Antony is framed in *Satires* 1.5 as a dispute between estranged friends, here the imminent civil war between Octavian and Sextus is filtered through the citizens' eyes as a race to the bottom between sordid types like the upstart and "a rabble of pirates and slaves." The absence of Octavian and Sextus in the citizens' discussion of civil war underscores the extent to which political struggle between men who hold Rome's future in their hands happens beyond the grasp of the ordinary. It is almost as if the opposing leaders of the impending battle exist outside the visual range and class consciousness of the people on the street. Indeed, by having the passers-by expressing their disapproval of the upstart's association with Octavian, Horace not only suggests that the public *expects* Octavian to have nothing to do with such lowly characters, but even implies that the Roman people would wish Octavian's virtuous status remain unchanged and untouched.[32]

This attempt to distance Octavian from the depravity of others goes some way to restore his image at the time. It is well documented that prior to the battle of Naulochus, Sextus, who claimed Neptune as his adoptive father (cf. *Neptunius* | *dux*, Hor. *Epod.* 9.7–8; App. *BCiv.* 5.100; Dio 48.48.5), had the support of the people at Rome (Dio 48.31.5–6; Suet. *Aug.* 16.2).[33] Meanwhile, the *Divi filius* struggled to compete with the popularity and tactics of his rival, and was the target of the anger of the Roman masses who endured famine under Sextus' blockade of the grain supply from Sicily (Suet. *Aug.* 16.1).[34] By having the Roman citizens assuming the moral superiority of Octavian's side, Horace's poem repositions the triumvir as "the people's choice" when in fact he was far from popular. But more importantly, it should be noted that while the citizens try to distinguish the upstart from his nobler commander, there is no such distinction in their assessment of the Pompeian faction, who are regarded indiscriminately as a group of pirates and lawless slaves (4.19).

[32] Watson (2002, 223) interprets the focalization through the citizens differently: he argues that by making citizens voice their damning assessment of the political situation, Horace manages to maintain his own independence of judgement.

[33] The image of Neptune and his symbolic trident appeared on Sextan *denarii* that circulated widely in Italy, see, e.g., *RRC* 511/2 and 511/4.

[34] See further discussions by Powell (2008, 97–8, 259–61); Miller (2009, 24); Welch (2012, 43–91).

This characterization of the Pompeian army is of course a slight on Sextus' self-stylization as the son of Neptune.[35] It also reduces the status of Sextus to that of an armed slave and thus no better than the upstart, who is a freedman-turned-army-officer. By subtly establishing this parallel between Sextus and the upstart while removing Octavian from their level, Horace implies that the new Caesar is a better and loftier entity, belonging to a different *genus*. In fact, the poem's earlier assertion, *fortuna non mutat genus* (4.6), now applies to the conflict between Octavian and his rival as much as it does to the inordinate rise of the upstart. The *fortuna* of war does not change one's *genus*: pirates and bandits led by a Neptunian pretender are exactly that, whereas the aboveness of Octavian is (or at least should be) unassailable. Octavian's absence from the poem therefore, far from being incidental, serves to underline that the new Caesar not only rises above the civil-war cesspit, but that his aboveness is immutable and indisputable.

One difficulty remains, however. Critics of this *Epode* have noted "the disturbing similarities"[36] between the upstart and Horace, since the poet himself had once served as *tribunus militum* at Philippi and afterwards enjoyed a comparable elevation to position of prominence within Octavian's circle.[37] It has been suggested that the convergence between the upstart and Horace can be seen as the poet deliberately courting a charge of hypocrisy, a move fitting for an iambist who relishes self-deflation.[38] Nevertheless, the poem's final revelation that the upstart occupies a military office associated with Horace's previous opposition to Octavian evidently implicates the poet in the confusion between self and other, friend and enemy, which is inherent in the very concept of civil war.[39] The reading of *Epode* 4 presented above brings out another

[35] For an overview of the use divine self-imaging by the generals of the late Republic, see Beard-North-Price (1998, 141–7). The most informative recent discussions on the interaction between divine self-imaging and contemporary poetry include Miller (2009, 15–53), Cucchiarelli (2011, 155–60), and Pandey (2018, 36–50). Earlier studies, such as Weinstock (1971) and Gurval (1995), remain important. Cole (2013) has shown that divinization and divine impersonation were certainly already an important element of elite discourse by 44 B.C.E.

[36] Watson (2003, 150).

[37] See discussions by Carrubba (1969, 56–7); Henderson (1987); Oliensis (1991, 118) and (1998, 66–7); Williams (1995, 312). The interweaving of Rome's political instability and the poet' psychological and corporeal anxieties has been well studied by Henderson (1987), Fitzgerald (1988), and Gowers (2016, 103–30).

[38] Watson (2003, 152).

[39] Fitzgerald (1988, 183); Giusti (2016, 133).

of the poem's blurred dichotomies, namely that between transformation and immutability. The upstart of this poem is clearly a transformed figure, yet he is thought of as fundamentally unchangeable (cf. *fortuna non mutat genus*). Horace too is a changed man—a convert to the Octavianic cause—but he also has an unalterable past: he was on the "wrong side" at Philippi. By contrast, Octavian and the worthiness of his cause are, as the poem implicitly claims, immutable. By thus cultivating an aura of unimpeachable distinction around Octavian, *Epode* 4 makes the new Caesar transcend the partisan confusion and societal volatility of the triumviral period, making him an altogether different kind of political entity from his rivals.

3. ON THE EVE OF ACTIUM

In the three "pre-Actium" poems discussed so far, we have seen Horace carefully removing Octavian from the surface of his poetry in such a way that the absence of Octavian underlines the glaring disparity in power and status between the new Caesar and other men. Through images of concealed capability (*Sat.* 1.3), unreachable authority (*Sat.* 1.5), and hierarchical aboveness (*Epod.* 4), the poet carves out a position of seemingly exceptional pre-eminence for Octavian, which draws attention to his outsized political influence but also sets him apart from the power struggle and civic unrest happening on the ground. In doing so, Horace suggests on the one hand that Octavian operates at a level well beyond the topsy-turvy world of partisan politics; but on the other hand that Octavian's being "out there" has enormous and indeterminate consequences for all Romans.

This twofold nature of Octavian's removedness is intensified in the opening movement of *Epode* 1, which takes the form of a *propemptikon* addressed to Maecenas prior to his departure to Actium. While Octavian gets namechecked, his presence in *Epode* 1 is no more immediate than his complete absence in *Satires* 1.5 and *Epode* 4. Caesar hovers at the edges of the poem, about to disappear into the unknown; but Horace's self-positioning in relation to Octavian's impending absence highlights the extent to which Caesar has distant control over the poet's life while the poet has none over Caesar's (*Epod.* 1.1–10):

> Ibis Liburnis inter alta navium,
> amice, propugnacula,
> paratus omne Caesaris periculum
> subire, Maecenas, tuo:

quid nos, quibus te vita si superstite,
iucunda, si contra, gravis?
utrumne iussi persequemur otium
non dulce, ni tecum simul,
an hunc laborem, mente laturi decet
qua ferre non mollis viros?

You will go, my friend, on Liburnian vessels among the tall bulwarks of ships, prepared to undergo every risk of Caesar's at your own risk, Maecenas. What about me, to whom life is delightful if you survive, but otherwise heavy? Shall I, as bidden, follow peaceful pursuits, which are not sweet if not shared with you? Or shall I endure this hardship, determined to bear it with the spirit that men ought to show if they are not weaklings?

Maecenas is about to follow his commander, Octavian, into war and put his own life at risk for him (cf. *omne Caesaris periculum | subire . . . tuo*, 1.3–4); and Horace feels that he is duty-bound to do the same for Maecenas (1.1–4; cf. *te . . . forti sequemur pectore*, 1.11–14).[40] Given the nature of their relationship, the poet's outlook on life (1.5–6), joyful or gloomy, ultimately hinges on what happens to Caesar, whose actions fall outside of the poem's visual range and can only be inferred from what Maecenas does. The physical distance that is about to be opened up between Horace, Maecenas, and Octavian thus throws into sharp relief a hierarchical order at the top of which sits Caesar.[41]

The removal of Octavian and Maecenas from Horace's life also makes the poet realize that things cannot go on as normal without them. Life's true sweetness, so Horace claims, can only be experienced in the company of Maecenas (*non dulce, ni tecum simul*, 1.8); otherwise it is just mandatory fun (cf. *iussi*, 1.7). The word *iussi* does not need to be interpreted strictly as a command from a patron;[42] but its usage here clearly connotes Horace's recognition of Maecenas' superiority. The crescendo of deliberative questions stretching over six verses (1.5–10) underlines the poet's inability to be his own master in the absence of his friend-benefactor, which in turn highlights the extent to which Maecenas—and

[40] Kraggerud (1984, 29–30) argues that the wording of lines 3–4, set against the exemplary actions of Maecenas and Horace, evoke the *coniuratio totius Italiae*, the oath of loyalty to Octavian taken by Italy and the western provinces in 32 B.C.E. (which does not survive) after the declaration of war against Cleopatra. This suggestion, as Watson (2003, 55) rightly points out, is highly speculative, albeit very attractive.

[41] On this hierarchy, see also Oliensis (1998, 80–1).

[42] White (1993, 267–80).

by extension, Octavian—has become a kind of centre of gravity. Above all, by suggesting that he simply cannot find true pleasure in life without having his superiors around, Horace embeds the towering status of Caesar into the social reality of civil-war Rome.

The idea that Horace ultimately links his livelihood to the safety of Caesar (cf. *Caesaris periculum*, 1.3) finds fuller expression later in *Odes* 3.14. There, Augustus' triumphal return from the Cantabrian campaign, after narrowly escaping death (3.14.1–4), provides an occasion for the poet to reflect on his own security since Caesar took control of the Roman world (cf. 3.14.13–16). Lowrie argues that the Augustan poets' formulation of civic safety as being embodied in the leader, which has overtones of Persian and Hellenistic kingship, "both reveal[s] and hold[s] at a distance Roman discomfort with the direction politics was taking as a result of civil war."[43] Here in *Epode* 1, Horace does not yet establish a direct link between his own life and Caesar's: only Maecenas is explicitly presented as the provider of joy and security for Horace. Nonetheless, the poet's framing of his *vita iucunda* (1.5–6) as something that is mediated exclusively by these men already draws attention to what might lie ahead for Rome on the eve of the battle of Actium. Moreover, by emphasizing the link between his enjoyment of *otium* and the presence of Maecenas and Octavian, Horace subtly invests a divine quality in these men. The poet's notion of a "sweet pleasure" (*otium . . . dulce*, 1.7–8) evokes the Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia*, which Virgil also alludes to with similar vocabulary at the end of the *Georgics* (*illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat | Parthenope studiis florentem ignobilis oti*, Verg. *G.* 4.563–4);[44] and Horace's apparent inability to find true sweetness in *otium* unless he is in the company of Maecenas subtly assimilates his patron to Epicurus—a "god" in the eyes of Lucretius (cf. *deus ille fuit, deus, inclute Memmi*, *DRN* 5.8). Equally importantly, Horace also seems to be in dialogue with Virgil's First *Eclogue*, in which a powerful young man, who is often identified in scholarship as Octavian, grants *otium* to the shepherd Tityrus and is subsequently worshipped as a "god" (cf. *deus nobis haec otia fecit*, Verg. *Ecl.* 1.6).[45] Admittedly, Horace does not present

[43] Lowrie (2015, 323); see also her discussion of *Odes* 3.14 on pp. 331–2.

[44] On the Epicurean undertone of the Virgilian *sphragis*, see most recently Freer (2019, 80). On Horace's familiarity with Epicurean philosophy, see most recently Yona (2018).

[45] See also Fitzgerald (1988, 176) on the possible dialogue between the openings of *Epod.* 1 and *Ecl.* 1. While there is widespread acceptance that the young man in *Ecl.* 1 is Octavian, several alternatives have been put forward: see Liegle (1943, 219–26); Grisart (1966); Berkowitz (1972, 26 n. 26); Mayer (1983); Wright (1983); Cairns (2008, 70–4). More

himself as fervently devoted to his superiors as Tityrus and Lucretius are; and the poet of *Epode* 1 is far from the inert, Epicurean "Vergilius" we find at the end of the *Georgics*. However, by evoking such deified benefactors as the Lucretian Epicurus and the Virgilian *deus* of *Eclogue* 1, Horace—in his attempt to communicate with his patron—underlines the fact that Maecenas is no ordinary man, and Octavian even less so. As Caesar's ships set sail for Actium, the intertextual activities of the poet's formulation of his *otium* sensitize readers to the idea that the relationship between Horace and Octavian could be about to be reconfigured, and that Octavian's near-numinous status may stretch to the breaking point the conventional social dynamic and political structure of Republican Rome.

4. RISING ABOVE THE REPUBLIC

This re-ordering of relations becomes apparent in *Epode* 9. Set in the heady aftermath of the battle of Actium, *Epode* 9 depicts the poet toasting Octavian's victory against the backdrop of sympotic activities (cf. *Epod.* 9.1–10, 33–8).[46] Unlike the poems discussed above, Caesar's presence can clearly be detected throughout *Epode* 9 and especially in the poem's sympotic frame, which will be discussed in more detail shortly. On the other hand, the person of Octavian himself is still, in some sense, removed from the poem. In line 2, he is already "victor . . . Caesar," subsumed under that glorious moniker. In line 18, his name is "sung," invoked as if in a hymn or prayer—though the singer is not the poet, or even Roman, but a group of "Galli" (*Galli canentes Caesarem*).[47] Furthermore, Horace again creates a stark distance between his realm of activity and Octavian's to the point that the latter virtually disappears out of sight and seems to transcend the Republican world altogether. The clearest indication of this can be found in the poet's extravagant comparison of Octavian to great Republican generals of the past (9.23–6):

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recently, critics exploring the Epicurean tenets of the *Eclogues* have argued that the young man may bring to mind the Greek founder of the sect (or at least Lucretius' portrait of him): see esp. Rundin (2003); Hardie (2006, 290–1); Karakasis (2011, 176–7); Davis (2012, 79–98); Scholl (2014, 493–4); Bing (2016); Kronenberg (2016).

[46] The poem's sympotic frame has been much discussed: see esp. Bartels (1973); Slater (1976); Macleod (1982); Loupiac (1998); Cucchiarelli (2006); Giusti (2016).

[47] The "Galli" refer to the Galatians of Amyntas, who defected to Octavian's side right before the battle of Actium (Serv. ad *Aen.* 6.612). But might Horace also be evoking the *galli*, who are the priests of Magna Mater, and thus playing with the idea that Octavian's status after Actium is akin to that of a powerful divinity (i.e., no longer just a Roman politician)?

io Triumphe, nec Iugurthino parem
bello reportasti ducem
neque Africanum, cui super Carthaginem
virtus sepulcrum condidit.

Hail, Triumph! You did not bring back such a general from the Jugurthine War, nor was Africanus such, whose valour built a tomb over Carthage.

Horace's assertion that Octavian ranks higher (*nec . . . parem*, 9.23) than Marius and "Africanus" after the victory at Actium is no straightforward eulogy. In 101 B.C.E., the seven-time consul Marius received offerings of food and libations along with the gods for his victories over Jugurtha and the Germans.[48] The popular cult of Marius redefined the limit of what kind of honours could be given to a Republican statesman until the rules were rewritten again during the dictatorship of Julius Caesar. Likewise, both Scipio Aemilianus and Publius Cornelius Scipio were thought to have achieved divine status for demonstrating extraordinary *virtus* in their service to the Republic (cf. Cic. *Rep.* 6.13, 26). Moreover, as Cole has shown, the very idea of a merit-based apotheosis appeared to have been embedded into Roman political thought by Cicero through the figure of Scipio Aemilianus (cf. Cic. *Rep.* 2.4, 17–20).[49] The Africanus in Horace's poem may refer to either the Younger or the Elder Scipio (or both).[50] But regardless of the exact identity of Horace's Africanus, the famous generals of this passage are undoubtedly icons of divinized Republican statesmen. By asserting that Marius and Africanus are no match for Octavian, Horace elevates the victor at Actium to a position that is unprecedented in the history of Rome. The new Caesar's "aboveness" removes him from the realm of other men, including the greatest statesmen of the Roman Republic; and the underlying implication of this poetic image is the idea that Octavian could no longer be contained or defined within the traditional political framework of the Republic, but that he appears to stand outside and beyond it.

The serious, and not entirely positive, impact this could have on the political future of Rome is hinted at by Horace. Giusti's recent study has drawn our attention to the relevance of Sallust's *Bellum Iurgurthinum* as an intertext of *Epode* 9 (cf. *Iugurthino . . . bello*, 23–4), and has pointed out that Sallust saw the war against Jugurtha as a reaction to the *superbia*

[48] Plut. *Mar.* 27.9; Val. Max. 8.15.7; with discussion by Beard-North-Price (1998, 133–4).
[49] Cole (2013, 85–103, esp. 92–4, 98–102).
[50] The Younger Scipio, Aemilianus: Watson (2003, 330). The Elder Scipio, Publius Cornelius: Kraggerud (1984, 104–5). Conflation of both: Cairns (1983, 83–4).

which had become widespread in the moral crisis of the Late Republic following the destruction of Carthage (cf. *tunc primum superbiae nobilitatis obviam itum est*, "then for the first time resistance was offered to the insolence of the nobles," Sall. *Iug.* 5.1).[51] In light of the Sallustian intertext, Horace's suggestion that Marius is not equal to Octavian elevates the latter to a position of superiority, which can either be seen as the kind of *superbia* that the Jugurthine war was meant to challenge, or the sort of claim to superiority that fuels civil conflict.[52] In this way, Horace on the one hand glorifies the achievements of Octavian by suggesting that he has surpassed the limit of greatness established by previous Republican generals, while on the other hand he problematizes Octavian's unmatched singularity, subtly framing it as something that does not resolve the civil war, but rather reinscribes its inevitability.

The notes of alarm concerning what Octavian's unparalleled status would mean for Rome both encapsulate the underlying anxiety running through *Epode* 9, and open up the interpretation of the poem's much-discussed sympotic frame. While *Epode* 9 clearly exudes a celebratory mood, there is an undercurrent of uncertainty evident from its very first lines. The poem begins with Horace wondering when he would be able to go to Maecenas' house so that they could drink together in Octavian's honour (9.1–4). This opening immediately raises questions about the whereabouts of Horace and Maecenas, and, more subtly, whether the poet's relationship with his friend-benefactor would stay the same after Actium. Later in the poem, when Horace turns his thoughts to the defeated Antony, the picture is again one of uncertainty as the poet tries to guess where in the world Antony would go into hiding (9.29–32). At the end of the poem, readers encounter another sympotic occasion: this time, the party appears to be in full swing already, possibly taking place on board a warship (9.33–8).[53] The sense of dislocation conjured up by the poem's sympotic frame, combined with reminders of the fluidity of the post-war

[51] Giusti (2016, 143).

[52] Giusti (2016, 144 n. 68).

[53] Critics have been unable to agree on whether *fluentem nauseam* ("flowing nausea," 9.35) refers to seasickness (Bücheler 1927, 320–1) or hangover (Fraenkel 1957, 71–5). Seasickness would imply that Horace and Maecenas were at Actium, a notion which divides scholarly opinion: see for example the contrasting positions of Setaioli (1981, 1716–28) and Watson (2003, 310–12). My view on whether Horace and Maecenas were present at Actium is similar to that of Kraggerud (1984, 67) and Williams (1968, 214): that is, this information is simply not ascertainable. I am, however, more than partial to the suggestion of Cucchiarelli (2006) that the idea of a symposium taking place on a warship would point to a superimposition of the private and the public spheres, which finds fuller expression in the poetry and politics of the Principate.

situation, underscores the worry and unpredictability bubbling beneath the poem's ostensibly celebratory surface.

This tension between triumphant excitement and latent anxiety in *Epode* 9 culminates in the poem's final sympotic image: *curam metumque Caesaris rerum iuvat | dulci Lyaeo solvere* ("It's a joy to loosen our worry and fear for Caesar's affairs with the help of sweet Lyaeus," 9.37–8). It has been noted that the linguistic ambiguity in the expression *curam metumque Caesaris rerum* ("our worry and fear *for* Caesar's cause" or "our worry and fear *of* Caesar's cause") leaves the poem on a troublingly equivocal note.[54] Moreover, given that the poem celebrates Octavian's victory over the unruly and degenerate forces of Antony and Cleopatra (cf. 9.11–16), critics have quite rightly found it strange that Horace now evokes the image of excessive drinking (cf. *capaciores adfer huc, puer, scyphos*, 9.33)—in other words, the unrestrained aspect of Bacchus—to alleviate anxiety about Octavian, the supposed civilizer of the East.[55]

One way of understanding the poem's conclusion is, as Giusti suggests, to view Horace's embrace of "sweet Lyaeus" as an act of ideological conversion—an "early, almost embryonic example" of a recognizable Bacchic poetics in the *Odes*, where the *furor* and transgression of the inspired poet convey a guilty will to power and thus indicate the poet's political reconciliation to the new regime.[56] However, as I pointed out above, the tension that resides in *Epode* 9 makes it difficult to read the poem's conclusion only as an attempt at reconciliation. Instead I would suggest that this final image, infused with ambiguity and contradiction, also conveys the poet's anxiety that he is unable to determine what kind of force Caesar is becoming and what the future holds for Rome. The victory at Actium has propelled Caesar to new heights unparalleled in Republican history, removing him from the realm of even great men; but the flipside of this turn of events, as Horace earlier implies, is that no one knows for sure whether this spells the end of Rome's troubles or the beginning of yet more. The double-meaning of *curam metumque Caesaris rerum* (9.37), to my mind, underscores this unknowability. The sympotic

[54] Mankin (1995, 181).

[55] Giusti (2016, 136); Watson (2003) on 9.38. As Giusti points out, the double symposium of poem's opening and closing movements draw out the duality of Bacchus as on the one hand the peacemaker and civilizing conqueror of the east, who was assimilated to Octavian in his victory over Egypt, and on the other hand the deity of wine and orgiastic cults, equated with Antony in his unrestrained drunkenness.

[56] Giusti (2016, 138). On Bacchic poetics in the *Odes*, see Batinski (1990–1, 362, 374); Silk (1969); Schiesaro (2009).

frame of the poem further indicates that Caesar could either turn out to be a Bacchic civilizer, a *Liber Pater* incarnate who brings about peace to Rome; or he could turn out to be an unrestrainable Dionysus, one who transgresses boundaries and whose power is unpredictable.[57] Seen against this background, the poet's own descent into excess at the end of *Epode* 9 implies that the line between celebrating Caesar as a restorer of happier times, and acceding to Caesar's transgression of appropriate limits, is becoming increasingly blurred. In this way, the conclusion of *Epode* 9 gestures at the unknowable direction of politics as a result of Actium, and encapsulates the unnerving experience of facing up to a new political reality.

5. CONCLUSION

In *Satires* 1 and the *Epodes*, the various modes of removal used by Horace to keep Octavian at a distance indirectly underline the unreachable and indefinable position of the new Caesar. Octavian's largely absent presences in Horace's pre-Actium poetry suggests on the one hand that the poet is attempting to disassociate the triumvir from the volatile world of civil-war Rome, for which he was responsible. On the other hand, the lack of contiguity between the poet's social world and Octavian's world draws attention to the latter's outsized authority and the deeply unequal power relations between Octavian and his supposed peers. In the first poem set in the post-Actian world, *Epode* 9 pointedly emphasizes Octavian's "aboveness" and his departure from historical precedents. In doing so, the poem not only conveys the unnerving uncertainty of Rome's political direction after Actium, but also the sense that the Roman subject—including the poet himself—is being kept afar from and unable to figure out the man who is about to take sole control of the Roman world. Above

[57] *Epode* 9 develops an association between Octavian and free-spirited celebration in stages. In the poem's opening address to Maecenas, Horace suggests that they should celebrate Octavian's victory at Actium just as they celebrated his victory over Sextus (9.7–10): the poet here claims that Sextus had threatened to enslave Rome (9.7–9). Two lines later, Horace presents another image of slavery: a Roman soldier—most probably Antony—enslaved by Cleopatra (9.11–14). Through this pair of images of slavery, Horace implies firstly that both Actium and Naulochus should be construed as wars of liberation (rather than civil wars); and secondly, that Octavian is the liberator of Rome. The proposed symposium thus establishes a connection between free-flowing wine consumption and civic freedom, *otium* and Actium, Bacchus and Octavian. The switch of Bacchus from Antony to Octavian also serves to rehabilitate the deity as a "freer" in a different sense.

all, however, *Epode* 9 shows that Caesar's restoration of peace to Rome and his leading of Rome onto a path of constitutional uncertainty are two sides of the same coin. To engage in this kind of "doublethink," as Horace does in *Epode* 9, is precisely what is required to make sense of the Augustan Principate.[58]

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