Flaccus' Poetics: Horace-Paris saved by Mercury-Augustus*

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In this paper, firstly I want to discuss some Horatian passages in which we find the *recusatio*, that, more often than not, is taken as a declaration of poetic principles which Callimachus invented. But recently, the staging of the refusal of the epic genre by Augustan poets has been understood as a representation of political *recusationes*, often carried out by Augustus himself¹. I believe, however, that one can explore the poetic and political *topos* in Horace, from another perspective yet: the affirmation of his weakness by refusing the highest genre or war, in all his works, is not only a subterfuge used to associate himself with the poetics of Callimachus and representation of political acts, but it is also a facetious statement, which plays with its own name and proposes a poetics of weakness. Hence, in the second part of this paper, I intend to show how, in the *Odes*, this weakness

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¹ Freudenburg (2014).

is identified with the effeminate Paris, a warrior suitable for the lyre and love, and, conversely, Horace as a lyric poet unfit for war. In this second part I also explore an aspect sometimes forgotten in reading certain poems, although it is not a new trend in Horatian studies, the poetic book format

Opening the book of *Epodes*, the poet, addressing his friend Maecenas, calls himself *imbellis ac firmus parum* (*epod.* 1.16), being, by litotes – a weak mode of expression – not suitable for war. Previously, the feeble poet, even when speaking about the brave (v.10: *qua ferre non mollis uiros*), uses the euphemism that Cavarzere (1992, 121) noted as a possible joke on the poet's own *cognomen* (*Flaccus*). He also notes that the litotes at v. 16 – *imbellis ac parum firmus* – is likely an echo of Homer². I think that it is a sure reference to the second book of the *Iliad* (v. 201), in which Odysseus, to rebuke those who want to return home, addresses one of them in these terms: ... ἀπτόλεμος καὶ ἀναλκις (unwarlike and feeble). Horace, therefore, portrays himself, not wanting to go to war, as a weak warrior who wants to return home, like Thersites, whom Odysseus addresses (vv. 246-264) and makes him the object of the Achaean's laughter. Thus the poet, in turn, laughs at himself.

This inaugural weakness - and comedy - will pervade all the epodic work so that the iambic poet who once led his opponents to death, like Archilochus and Hipponax³, wants, conversely, to die, but powerless - in many ways – he is subjugated by Canidia the sorceress, his most constant opponent, and suffers at her

² Cavarzere (1992, 122).

³ On the paradoxicality of the arquoquean Horace, see Barchiesi (2001, 154) and Harrison (2001, 167-74). However, for the resumption of the despised genre of the infidel Lycambes and of the bitter enemy of Bupalus, see Cucchiarelli (2008, 92-4). Remember that Archilochus also has his moments of weakness when leaving the shield: fr. 5 W.

hands, as a last act of the book (*epod.* 17), which proposes a reversal of iambs and leaves the epodic mode⁴.

Throughout the epodic collection, the image of the weak Flaccus intensifies⁵. In *epod.* 3, the belly of the poet is able to endure garlic, in a convivial context, at the hands the jocular Maecenas (v. 20: *iocose Maecenas*), just like the tough digestion of rural reapers (v. 4: *o dura messorum ilia*). The exaggeration here in invective against the effects caused by garlic, hyperbolic from start to finish, studied in detail by Gowers (1996, 249), further emphasizes Horace's weakness and delicate stomach, suffering as if he had poison in the very bowels (v. 5: *quid hoc ueneni saeuit in praecordiis?*).

In the beginning of the collection's second part (*epod.* 11), Horace enacts his poetic crisis⁶: hurt by violent love, the poet cannot carry forward the poetic book he has begun (vv. 1-2: *Petti, nihil me, sicut antea, iuuat / scribere uersiculos amore percussum graui*). The poet, with such a wound, introducing the elegiac meter, assumes both the elegiac character of mourning, crying (v. 12: ... *querebar adplorans tibi*). And so exhausted (v. 9: *languor*) later in the book, he leaves the violent invective, "the iambs once started, the promised work" (*epod.* 14. 7: *inceptos olim, promissum carmen, iambos*), which is afflicted by "soft inertia" (*epod.* 14. 1: *mollis inertia*), i.e., we see again the poet who lacks strength.

It is precisely lacking strength, helpless, that we find Horace in the next epode (*epod.* 12)⁷, jokingly involved with an old woman, in which we find, again, double litotes (v.3: *nec firmo iuueni neque naris obesae*), when he resumes, in part, the

⁴ On *epod.* 17, as iambic in reverse, see Barchiesi (1994).

⁵ For the development of this idea, see Hasegawa (2011). See also Oliensis (1991) and Fitzgerald (1988).

⁶ About the poetic crisis, in relation to that of Catullus, in *carm.* 65, see Hasegawa (2010b).

⁷ As it was in *epod.* 8. For *epod.* 12 and 8, see Hasegawa (2010, 63-71).

initial characterization of the book (*epod.* 1. 16: *firmus parum*); a characterization that prepares the speech of the woman under attack, impatient with a flaccis young man (v. 16: *mollis*)⁸, with a virtual spado (v. 17: *inertem*).

Horace, then, seeing Rome itself collapse by its own strength (*epod.* 16. 2: *ipsa Roma uiribus ruit*), before succumbing to the magical powers of Canidia, does not propose to stay and fight but rather to flee (v. 66: *piis secunda uate me datur fuga*). The poet then tries to escape the war, at the beginning, looks helplessly to escape from the woman in the middle, and tries, eventually, to flee Rome (ῥώμη, 'strength'), because he is feeble.

At the beginning of the second book of *Satires*, to Horace's question on what to do about criticism of his excess and deficiency, that is, of his strength and weakness (*sat.* 2.1.1-2: *nimis acer .../ sine neruis*)⁹, the jurist Trebatius responds laconically, "be quiet" (v. 5: *quiescas*), i.e. the lawyer suggests to the satirist to stop writing, to abandon poetry. Horace recognizes that this is the best solution for his problem, but he cannot sleep: he suffers from insomnia and therefore cannot stop writing. To heal his insomnia, Trebatius suggests that he swim the Tiber three times and at night drink copious amounts of wine, or if the love for writing is too intense, he advises Horace to narrate the deeds of Caesar (*sat.* 2.1.10-15)¹⁰:

aut si tantus amor scribendi te rapit, aude	10
Caesaris inuicti res dicere, multa laborum	
praemia laturus.' 'cupidum, pater optime, uires	
deficiunt; neque enim quiuis horrentia pilis	
agmina nec fracta pereuntis cuspide Gallos	
aut labentis equo describit uolnera Parthi.'	15

⁸ Term that resumes *epod.* 1. 10: *mollis uiros* and will be resumed in *epod.* 14.1: *mollis inertia*.

⁹ To read these terms, first, with reference to the *sublime* and *humile genera*, and then, as sexual allusion, see Freudenburg (1990).

¹⁰ On the *recusatio* scheme here, see Fedeli (1994, 534-6).

But if Horace is unable to stop writing, then he should dare to write epic poetry and narrate the deeds of the undefeated Augustus, because thus he will win reward for his work. The satirical genre, as Horace himself says in *sat. 1, 4, 24-25* (*quod sunt quos genus hoc minime iuuat, utpote pluris / culpari dignos*), is appreciated by few, as many are blame worthy. But if, at first, Horace mentions that he received criticism for being feeble and sinewless in satires, now he acknowledges he lacks strength to describe deeds of war. Following the precepts that he will write in the *Ars Poetica* (vv. 38-40: vv. 38-40: *Sumite materiam uestris, qui scribitis, aequam / uiribus et uersate diu quid ferre recusent, / quid ualeant umeri*), the satirical author knows that his shoulders are not able to bear such subjects. By refusing the higher genre, he situates the satire on minor genre, pedestrian, suited to his weakness, alluded to by his name with which he plays in sequence (*sat. 2.1.16-20*):

‘attamen et iustum poteras et scribere fortem,
Scipiadam ut sapiens Lucilius.’ ‘haud mihi dero,
cum res ipsa feret: nisi dextro tempore *Flacci*
uerba per attentam non ibunt Caesaris aurem:
cui male si palpere, recalcitrat undique tutus.’ 20

Having introduced the inventor and the satirical genre model, Lucilius, Horace says he intends to praise Augustus, but fears that, at the right time, the words of a weak person do not reach the listening ear of Caesar. By playing with his own name, the satirist characterizes himself as weak, but this weakness is not that of verses without sinews, I think, but another kind that is, in fact, a virtue in the description that Horace makes of himself in *sat. 1.4*, to oppose himself to Lucilius, his model. I quote the passage in which he remembers the models of the creator of the satirical genre (vv. 1-21.):

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanes poetae
atque alii, quorum comoedia prisca uirorum est,
siquis erat dignus describi, quod malus ac fur,

quod moechus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui
 famosus, multa cum libertate notabant. 5
 Hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus
 mutatis tantum pedibus numerisque, facetus,
 emunctae naris, durus componere uersus;
 nam fuit hoc uitiosus; in hora saepe ducentos,
 ut magnum, uersus dictabat, stans pede in uno. 10
 Cum fluere lutulentus, erat quod tollere uelles;
 garrulus atque piger scribendi ferre laborem,
 scribendi recte: nam ut multum, nil moror. Ecce,
 Crispinus minimo me prouocat: "accipe, si uis,
 accipiam tabulas; detur nobis locus, hora, 15
 custodes; uideamus uter plus scribere possit".
 Di bene fecerunt, inopis me quodque pusilli
 finxerunt animi, raro et perpauca loquentis;
 at tu conclusas hircinis foliis auras
 usque laborantis, dum ferrum molliat ignis, 20
 ut mauis, imitare.

Thus, to Lucilius faulty when composing verses, to the *lutulentus* inventor who at one time would dictate two hundred lines, chatty and lazy, just like the philosopher and poet Crispinus, is opposed Horace who has a weak heart, small, needy, speaking little and rarely. Similarly, Persius will also oppose the two models, claiming to be a violent Lucilius, biting opponents until breaking his teeth, and a subtle Flaccus, touching the vices of his laughing friend (*sat.* 1.114-117):

(...) secuit Lucilius urbem,
 te Lupe, te Muci, et genuinum fregit in illis. 115
 omne uaferrum uitium ridenti *Flaccus* amico
 tangit (...).

In the second book of the *Epistles*, addressing Augustus, again in a military context, he states that modesty does not dare to sing what the shoulders cannot bear (*epist.* 2.1.258-59: ... *nec meus audet / rem temptare pudor quam uires ferre recusent*), similar to what he says at the *Ars Poetica*, 38-40: *sumite materiam uestris, qui scribitis, aequam / uiribus et uersate diu quid ferre recusent, / quid ualeant umeri*) where he advises

choosing a subject appropriate to one's strength. Although he prefers writing about great deeds to writing pedestrian *sermones* (vv. 250-251: *nec sermones ego mallem / repentis per humum quam res componere gestas*), he is not able to do it. One who is weak can only offer to the *princeps* a *carmen paruum* that the Augustan majesty cannot accept (vv. 257-258: *sed neque paruum / carmen maiestas recipit tua*)¹¹.

As we have seen so far, the poet's weakness is present in *Epodes*, in the *Satires* and *Epistles*. Most of the time, as stated at the beginning, the passages have been studied as refusals¹² to write epic, although the reasons are found already in older poetry, in the *Aitia* of Callimachus (fr. 1. 17-24 Pf.). However, more recently, the refusal has been studied as a representation of the political *recusationes*. Now, in the second part, knowing that the poetic refusal is a weakness inherent to the poet Flaccus, I want to understand it as a mode of identification, with the *Odes*, in the inappropriate warrior Paris.

I begin with the most quoted and commented refusal of Horace, *carm.* 1.6:

Scriberis Vario fortis et hostium uictor, Maconii carminis alite, quam rem cumque ferox nauibus aut equis miles te duce gesserit.	
Nos, Agrippa, neque haec dicere nec grauem Pelidae stomachum cedere nescii, nec cursus duplicis per mare Vlixei nec saeuam Pelopis domum	5
conamur, tenues grandia, dum <i>pudor</i> <i>imbellisque lyrae</i> Musa potens uetat laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas culpa deterere ingeni.	10

¹¹ For an analysis of the excerpt, with bibliography, see Piccolo (2014, 121-123; 173-175).

¹² For the history of *recusatio*, see Pasquali (1920, 313-5), Nisbet; Hubbard (1970, 81-83) and Davis (1991, 28-33).

Quis Martem tunica tectum adamantina
digne scripserit aut puluere Troico
nigrum Merionen aut ope Palladis 15
Tydiden superis parem?

Nos conuiuia, nos proelia uirginum
sectis in iuuenes unguibus acrium
cantamus, uacui siue quid urimur 20
non praeter solitum leues.

I do not intend to do a close reading of the ode, already much studied¹³. First of all, I am interested in placing it in the first book of *Odes*: it is the first poem written in the second Asclepaid stanza: three minor asclepiads followed by a glyconic. In the parade of *Odes* in which Horace presents several meters that he will use throughout his lyrical work, the *carm.* 1.6 as a “proemio al mezzo” opposes *lyra imbellis* (v. 10) to the praise of the egregious Caesar (v. 11), or, as in *epist.* 2.1.258–59, the modest poet does not dare to try subjects that his shoulders refuse to bear. Here, however, as we are in the lyrical genre, beyond modesty, we have the powerful Muse of the unwarlike lyre also vetoing the diminution of the praises of Augustus by a *carmen paruum*.

It is also worth mentioning that, if he rejects, on the one hand, certain subjects, on the other, by saying what he does sing, announces (vv. 16–20) only erotic and convivial topics (*ars* 85: *et iuuenum curas et libera uina referre*), or the humblest species of the genus. He does not oppose here epic subjects such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for example, or mention the lyric hymns, encomia and epinicia he alludes to in the *ars* (83–4) or to epinician, higher genres and therefore closer to the epic.

Further in the book, the second Asclepiad stanza returns, repeated for the first time, only in *carm.* 1.15, an ode in which Nereus, turning to Paris, returning to Troy with Helen, makes his prophetic fateful speech. The perfidious Paris is thus described in the fourth and fifth stanzas (vv. 13–20):

¹³ I refer to Piccolo (2014), with bibliography.

Nequiquam Veneris praesidio ferox
pectes caesariem, grataque feminis
imbelli cithara carmina diuides: 15
nequiquam thalamo grauis

hastas et calami spicula Cnosii
uitabis strepitumque et celerem sequi
Aiacem: tamen, heu serus, adulteros 20
crines puluere collines.

Davis (1991, 27), from the peaceful lyre (v. 15) suggests a confrontation with the *carm.* 1.6, in which we have the powerful Muse of the peaceful lyre (v. 10). Thus, we can identify the poet Horace with Paris, the lyric poet unfit for war with the warrior suitable for the lyre. But if we now compare with the passage in which Alexander is reproached by his brother, Hector, before the battle with Menelaus, in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, we can deepen the comparison (vv. 39-57):

Δύσπαρι εἶδος ἄριστε γυναιμανὲς ἠπεροπευτὰ
αἴθ' ὄφελες ἄγονός τ' ἔμεναι ἄγαμός τ' ἀπολέσθαι: 40
καί κε τὸ βουλοίμην, καὶ κεν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν
ἢ οὕτω λώβην τ' ἔμεναι καὶ ὑπόψιον ἄλλων.
ἢ που καγχαλώωσι κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοὶ
φάντες ἀριστῆα πρόμον ἔμμεναι, οὐνεκα καλὸν
εἶδος ἔπ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔστι βίη φρεσὶν οὐδέ τις ἀλκή. 45
ἢ τοιόσδε ἐὼν ἐν ποντοπόροισι νέεσσι
πόντον ἐπιπλώσας, ἐτάρους ἐρίηρας ἀγείρας,
μιχθεὶς ἀλλοδαποῖσι γυναικ' εὐεῖδέ' ἀνήγες
ἐξ ἀπίης γαίης νυδὸν ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητῶν
πατρί τε σὼ μέγα πῆμα πόληϊ τε παντί τε δήμῳ, 50
δυσμενέσιν μὲν χάρμα, κατηφείην δὲ σοὶ αὐτῷ;
οὐκ ἂν δὴ μείνειας ἀρηϊφίλον Μενέλαον;
γνοίης χ' οἴου φωτὸς ἔχεις θαλερὴν παράκοιτιν:
οὐκ ἂν τοι χραίσμη κίθαρις τά τε δῶρ' Ἀφροδίτης
ἢ τε κόμη τό τε εἶδος ὅτ' ἐν κονίησι μιγείης. 55
ἀλλὰ μάλα Τρῶες δευδμήμονες: ἢ τέ κεν ἤδη
λαῖνον ἔσσο χιτῶνα κακῶν ἔνεχ' ὅσσα ἔοργας.

Although Porphyrio recognizes in *carm.* 1.15 the imitation of Bacchylides¹⁴, there is allusion, directly or indirectly, to the weak and non-warrior Paris who uses the lyre and love, but spoils his beautifully arranged hair in vain. The lyre of Alexander/Paris will be of no use to him in war, and, like Horace's lyre, although belonging to the powerful Muse, is not warlike. Similarly, Horace is iambic, peaceful, and thus will not be able to help his friend, Maecenas, in his departure to war or narrate the deeds of outstanding Caesar. The only course left to Paris, as to Horace, is just to run away, because he is feeble (*carm.* 1.15.31: *sublimi fugies mollis anhelitu*).

Horace-Paris Saved By Octavian-Mercury

We can then assume Horace is close to Paris, both too weak for war, but suited to the lyric, especially erotic. Now let us consider *carm.* 2.7, in which the poet states he abandoned his shield during the battle of Philippi (42 BC), when Mark Antony and Octavian, the future Augustus, defeated the murderers of Caesar - Cassius and Brutus - whom the poet had joined at the time studying in Athens. The ode is addressed to Pompey, an unknown character to us, with whom Horace shared the dangers of civil war and the pleasures of the symposium. Now, on the *princeps*' side and patronised by Maecenas, Horace celebrates his friend's return to Italy and invites him to a symposium:

O saepe mecum tempus in ultimum
deducte Bruto militiae duce,
quis te redonavit Quiritem
dis patriis Italoque caelo,

¹⁴ Porphyrio (1979, 23): *Hac ode Bacchylidem imitatur. Nam ut ille Cassandra facit uaticinari futura belli Troiani, ita hic Proteum* [In this ode he mimics Bacchylides. Indeed, he makes Cassandra foretell the future of the Trojan War, as here (the poet makes) Proteus (foretell)].

Pompei, meorum prime sodalium? Cum quo morantem saepe diem mero fregi coronatus nitentis malobathro Syrio capillos?	5
Tecum Philippos et celerem fugam sensi relictā non bene parmula, cum fracta uirtus et minaces, turpe solum tetigere mento:	10
sed me per hostis Mercurius celer denso pauentem sustulit aere, te rursus in bellum resorbens unda fretis tulit aestuosus.	15
Ergo obligatam redde Ioui dapem: longaque fessum militia latus depone sub lauru mea nec parce cadis tibi destinatis.	20
Obliuio leuia Massico ciboria exple, funde capacibus unguenta de conchis. Quis udo deproperare apio coronas	
curatue myrto? Quem Venus arbitrum dicet bibendi? non ego sanius bacchabor Edonis: recepto dulce mihi furere est amico.	25

It is the critical consensus that Horace here recounts historical fact, namely, that he actually fled from the battle at Philippi¹⁵ in a rapid escape (v. 9: ... *celerem fugam*), regardless of whether he abandoned the shield (v. 10: *relicta ... parmula*) or not, and of having been saved by the quick action of Mercury, snatching the poet from amidst the enemy in a mist (vv. 13-14: *sed me per hostis Mercurius celer / denso pauentem sustulit aere*). The poet also mentions the fight or alludes to that battle in other passages (cf. *sat.* 1.6.48, in which he points out that out that

¹⁵ Cf. Fraenkel (1957, 11); Nisbet; Hubbard (1978, 106-7); Romano (1991, 659). Cf. also Harrison (2016, 89-98).

he was *tribunus militum* in Brutus' army: *quod mihi pareret legio Romana tribuno*; *epist.* 2.2. 46-48, in which recalls the time of study in Athens, when he enlisted in the army of Brutus: *dura sed emouere loco me tempora grato / ciuilisque rudem belli tulit aestus in arma / Caesaris Augusti non responsura lacertis*). So, most likely, it was from the information of the Horatian texts that not only the historical Suetonius (*De poetis*, 40, 5-6: *bello Philippensi excitus a M. Bruto imperatore tribunus militum meruit*), but other historians and philologists have tried to rebuild the poet's life.

However, it is also well known that Horace, when reporting the escape of the battle of Philippi, and especially the abandonment of the shield, updates a *topos* found already in archaic Greek poets, important models for his lyrics. Archilochus (fr. 5 W), Alcaeus (fr. 428 ALP) and Anacreon (fr. 381b PMG)¹⁶ also narrate in poetry the abandonment of their own shield. Therefore, although it is plausible that the fact occurred, it seems likely that Horace is faking the pain of a historical abandonment¹⁷, emulating the archaic lyric poets. Having identified the commonplace, we can continue to analyse and try to understand why Horace uses the *topos* in this poem, as other scholars have done¹⁸.

First, about the comparison with other occurrences of shield abandonment in archaic Greek poets, one can say that they do not mention the fact that the warrior was removed from the battle by a god. The withdrawal of the poet, in a thick mist (v. 14: *denso ... aere*) carried by swift Mercury recalls a passage

¹⁶ For an analysis of the fragments, especially Archilochus', see Corrêa (1998, 110-33).

¹⁷ Fraenkel (1957, 11-2) already said that: 11-12: "The scholars who take Horace's phrase in this literal way discard as irrelevant the fact that some poets with whom Horace was thoroughly familiar and who inspired him in various ways, Archilochus, Alcaeus, and, possibly, Anacreon, had said of themselves that in the course of a battle they had thrown away their shield". For a comparison of the passage in *carm.* 2. 7 with Archilochus, see Cavarzere (1996, 211-5).

¹⁸ See, for instance, Harrison (2007, 25-6).

in Homer in which Paris, about to be defeated by Menelaus in a single fight, is subtracted from the fighting, wrapped in thick mist by the goddess Aphrodite and led to his bed-chamber to meet Helen (*Iliad* 3.380-382) ¹⁹:

(...) τὸν δ' ἐξήρπαξ' Ἀφροδίτη 380
 ῥεῖα μάλ' ὥς τε θεός, ἐκάλυψε δ' ἄρ' ἠέρι πολλῇ,
 καὶ δ' εἶς' ἐν θαλάμῳ εὐώδεϊ κηῶεντι.

If here, in the Homeric excerpt, the character is removed from the war by the goddess of love and brought to the bed-chamber to make love, in *carm.* 2.7, the character is removed from the war by the god who created the lyre²⁰ (cf. *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, vv. 23 ff.) and saved in order to write lyric poetry, to, among other things, to sing of love, the main subject of *carm.* 1.6. In this sense, one can understand the topic of shield abandonment as a form of epic denial, different from *carm.* 1.6 and 4.15, in which the Latin poet has as a model, especially the Αἴτια of Callimachus, and explicitly states that he will not sing of war, because he has not strength enough to do it. In *carm.* 2.7, therefore, the object of the shield may represent, by synecdoche, the epic genre²¹.

Let us return to the presence of Mercury, which, in addition to representing the lyric poetry, as we have said in meta-poetic

¹⁹ The withdrawal of a hero by a God during the battle is recurrent in the *Iliad* (5: 314 ff.; 20, 325 ff., and 20, 443 ff.). Romano (1991, 661) thinks Horace mimics rather the last excerpt (20, 443 ff.), when Apollo takes Hector away from the battle, but we know that in book 22, Hector dies in combat at the hands of Achilles. Thus, imitation seems to be rather of Book 3, in which Paris, taken from the battle, survives and enjoys the love of Helen, as the poet, taken from the battle survives and sings of love in his lyric verses.

²⁰ Here I suggest a different interpretation from that of Harrison (2007, 25), who understands Mercury as the god of poetry, without specifying a genre. Harrison (p. 24) also associates this fact with a different one: the fall of the tree that almost killed the poet, who, here too, was saved by a god (cf. *carm.* 2.13; 2.17, vv. 27-30; 3.4, v. 27).

²¹ On this association, see Hasegawa (2012).

reading, can be interpreted in a political sense, as we intend to show in what follows. Paul Zanker (1989, 48-58) showed how Sextus Pompey, with political objectives, compared himself with Hercules, Bacchus and Neptune²², or how Mark Antony was represented as Bacchus²³, while Octavian would rather play the role of favorite of Apollo, to whom he attributed, for example, the final victory over Sextus Pompey²⁴. Unsurprisingly the use of the Roman political characters made of deities and heroes. Thus we can also understand through the confrontation with other Horace's *Carmina* whom Mercury can represent in *carm.* 2.7, a fact not yet explored by critics, as far as we know.

Mercury-Octavianus

For this identification, we must return to the beginning of the first Book of *Odes*. In *carm.* 1.2, the first poem in Sapphic stanza, the poet narrates many terrible events (vv. 1-24), which happened to the Romans after the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 a.), As the civil war rages (vv. 21-24) the poet asks which god people will call on at the time the empire falls (vv. 25-25: *Quem uocet diuum populus ruentis / imperi rebus?*...). After calling Apollo, Venus and Mars (vv. 30-40) in the final three stanzas he looks at Mercury, who on earth, transfigured into a young man, appears as Caesar's avenger (vv. 41-52):

siue mutata iuuenem figura
ales in terris imitatis almae
filius Maiae patiens uocari
Caesaris ultor,

serus in caelum redeas diuque
laetus intersis populo Quirini,

45

²² Horace, for instance, refers to him as *Neptunius dux* (*epod.* 9, 7-8).

²³ He, after defeating the armenians, entered Alexandria dressed as Baco [cf. Zanker (1989, 52)].

²⁴ Cf. Zanker (1989, mainly 55-8).

neue te nostris uitiiis iniquum
ocior aura

tollat: hic magnos potius triumphos,
hic ames dici pater atque princeps, 50
neu sinas Medos equitare inultos
te duce, Caesar

Mercury's identification with Octavian, which causes some surprise²⁵, is explicit and exploited by all commentators. Although surprising, there seems to exist material evidence from the Augustan period, in which the emperor identified himself with this god²⁶: there is, for example, an image of Augustus carrying the caduceus²⁷; we can also find a cameo on which the face of the *princeps* is shown, with the caduceus²⁸; finally, there is numismatic evidence in which Mercury appears sitting on a rock and the inscription *Caesar divi f*²⁹. So the identification of Octavian with Mercury does not seem to be just an invention of Horace, but may have circulated among the Romans, and is rooted in the Hellenistic cult of the sovereign (Alexander, for example, already dressed as Hermes, and Ptolemy III appears on a gem using this god's attribute³⁰).

So after the first ode (*carm.* 1.1), which opens Horace's lyric career and contains poetic program for what follows, there is a poem dedicated to Octavian Augustus (*carm.* 1.2), which is exactly the one that removes Horace not from the battle, but rather from political faction, considered the enemy of the *Vrbs*,

²⁵ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, 34): "Horace's identification of Mercury and Octavian is a matter for surprise, which needs a note of some length". On this identification, see also Martins (2017).

²⁶ Cf. Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, 34).

²⁷ This object, however, seems to be of a posterior date to *carm.* 1.2, see Fraenkel (1957, 248, n.1).

²⁸ Zanker (1989, 285, 210 fig).

²⁹ For the numismatic evidence, see still Pasquali (1920, 182).

³⁰ Cf. Nisbet; Hubbard (1970, 35).

so that it allows him to be the poet of love, of the wine, of Rome and of the *princeps*. Thus, if we have in *carm.* 1.2 a praise of Octavian identified with Mercury, as protector from the internal and external enemies of Rome, we also find praise of Augustus in *carm.* 2.7, who, under the figure of Mercury, preserves the poet of Rome (cf. *carm.* 4. 6), removes him from the middle of the battle, just like Paris, for being weak and not knowing how to fight, and from the misunderstanding of aligning himself with Brutus and Cassius. The poet is safe so he can sing love in his lyric, a suitable subject for Flaccus.

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