VIRGIL'S VOYAGE

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In 1962 Professor Lionel Pearson read a short paper to the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast at Berkeley, in which he put forward the suggestion that Horace Odes 1.3 would make sense if interpreted as an allegory of Virgil's boldness in attempting an Aeneid: otherwise, he argued, the insistence on the dangers of sea-faring seemed excessive.¹ This view was supported by W.S. Anderson in the course of an article that appeared in 1966 on Odes 1.14. 'I agree', he writes, 'with Lionel Pearson that when Horace in C. 1.3 addresses Vergil's ship...he is primarily talking to Vergil the poet, who is hard at work "sailing on the high seas" and struggling to complete his Aeneid'.²

Then in 1967 Charles W. Lockyer Jr outlined the same theory in a short article in The Classical World.³ Lockyer makes no mention of Pearson's paper, which was unfortunately never published, but he does refer to Anderson's article and his passing reference to this poem. He also notes that J.P. Elder, at the end of an article published in 1952, had tentatively suggested a connection between this ode and Virgil's projected epic.⁴ More recently N.K. Zumwalt in an article on Odes 1.34, which he sees as an allegory of the poet abandoning a poetic voyage, has also added his support to this interpretation of 1.3.⁵ Lockyer's article is rather sketchy and inadequate; but in fact much more can be said in favour of the allegorical interpretation, taking into account not only the obvious Virgilian echoes in the poem, but also the fondness of the Augustan poets for extended metaphor, and particularly the metaphor of the ship.⁶

In the first place it is clear that the usual interpretations of the poem are all unsatisfactory. There are basically three. (1) The ode refers to a real voyage, and Horace is genuinely concerned about his friend's safety. We need not worry about the absence of other evidence for such a voyage before the year 19. The real problem is that the hazards of the crossing from Brundisium are exaggerated to an extent that is quite uncharacteristic of Horace, and the development of the poem, if it is a traditional propempticon, is completely inconsistent with the beginning. (2) the projected voyage is merely the occasion from which Horace moves on to his true theme, the daring impiety of man. But this is a poem for 1. I quote from a personal letter to me dated 14 October 1968.
4. J.P. Elder, 'Horace, C. 1.3', A.J.Ph. 73 (1952) 158.
6. This interpretation, in fact, occurred to me independently in 1968, and I put it forward first at a seminar in my own department and subsequently in a paper to the Otago Classical Association in the same year.
Virgil, who is given pride of place after Augustus in the book, and it is unsatisfactory that the tone of serious affection in the opening lines should turn out to be merely a pretext for moving on to a larger theme. (3) The tone of the poem is playful, and Virgil, who in the Fourth Eclogue had called sea-faring a crime, is being teased in language reminiscent of his own. But the overall seriousness and grandeur of the ode and its significant position in the book rule out the possibility that this is a flippant composition.

It is not surprising that critics who offer these explanations are somewhat unconvincing and often rather apologetic. Steele Commager plainly admits that 'the poem has long embarrassed commentators' and that 'certainly its progress is perplexing'. Wilkinson confines himself to discussing particular lines and does not assess the poem as a whole. Fraenkel significantly omits the ode, as if uneasy about it himself. Nisbet and Hubbard classify the poem as a conflation of the propempticon proper and the diatribe on inventiveness, and certainly it does borrow from these genres. But their assessment of the poetry seems to me to be seriously astray when they go on to say that 'Horace's ode is an accomplished piece of versification, but little more', and that 'there is not a hint of Virgil's poetry' in it, and that 'the flatness of the thought' is not 'redeemed by any special excellence in the writing'. Horace could never have written so unsatisfactory a poem for his closest friend and severest critic, and put it in a place of honour in the published collection of his odes.

To me the poem has an obvious power in both feeling and expression, and the real problem is to give it an interpretation that will match its poetic excellence and demonstrate its unity. If the ode is in fact about poetic composition, then the problem is resolved. Horace is never more serious than when he is writing about poetry.

When we turn to the poem itself, we find the first half of it full of Virgilian language in general and themes from the Aeneid in particular, and a continuation of the same heroic style in the second half, even if it is not so specifically Virgilian. Some of these echoes are noted in the standard commentaries, and others have been pointed out in the relevant articles, but a more thorough study of this aspect of the poem is required. In the following catalogue I have therefore noted against each line of the ode the main correspondences that are to be found in the Aeneid.

1. Venus as mother and protector of Aeneas is, of course, prominent throughout the Aeneid. She makes an appeal for her son's safe voyage firstly to Jupiter (1.250-2) and later to Neptune (5.796) liceat dare tuta per undas uela tibi. She is also referred to by Aeneas as his guide: matre dea monstrante uiam (1.382). Her

principal homes are in Cyprus, at Idalium and Paphus (1.415, 681; 10.86).
2. Castor and Pollux are referred to allusively as brothers of Helen, the prime
cause of the destruction of Troy, which is described at length in Aeneid 2. Helen
appears in the debatable passage 2.567-587, and is also mentioned incidentally in
1.650 and 7.364.11
3. Aeolus is prominent in the storm episode of Book I (52-156).12 He is called
rex Aeolus (52), and he keeps the winds imprisoned: imperio premit ac uinclis et
carcere frenat (54), clauso uentorum carcere (141).
4. The north-west wind that carries ships from Brundisium to Greece is given by
Horace the unusual name of Iapyx, as blowing from Iapygia, and this is the wind
that helped Cleopatra’s ships to escape from Actium, as in the scene on Aeneas’s
shield, undas et Iapyge ferri (8.710).
5. Virgil is thought of by Horace as a precious cargo entrusted to the care of the
ship, and this is how Palinurus speaks of entrusting Aeneas to the treacherous
winds: Aeneam credam quid enim fallacibus auris...? (5.850). And later Aeneas
grieves that Palinurus has been too trustful of the sea: o nimium caelo et pelago
confise sereno (5.870).
6. Helenus describes Aeneas’s destination as finis Italos (3.440), and Aeneas
refers in the same words to the destination of which his father has been cheated
(5.82). Again in Hades Aeneas speaks of Palinurus being promised by Apollo a
safe passage and arrival, qui fore te incolumem finisque canebat uenturum
Ausonios (6.345-6).
7. Daedalus after his daring flight lands at Cumae, redditus his primum terris
(6.18), and Aeneas and the Sibyl are disembarked incolumes (415) after their
passage of the Styx. There may not be a conscious echo of these episodes in
Horace’s line, but the language at least has a Virgilian character.
8. Mago appeals to the victorious Aeneas to spare his life with the words te
precor, hanc animam serues (10.525), and similarly Jupiter talks of saving
Turnus, possem incolumem seruare parenti (10.616), though neither is successful
in the event. The deep affection expressed in Horace’s words suggests that the
poem as a whole must be concerned with Virgil: cf. Od. 2.17.5 to Maecenas
suffering from a serious illness.
9. Strength of mind is expressed by Drances to Turnus in si tantum pectore
robur concipis (11.368-9), and aude atque aduersum fidens per pectus in hostem
(370). The phrase aes triplex describes the great shield of Mezentius, aere caicum
triplici (10.784), while other shields of bronze are those of Pallas (10.482),
Cupencus (12.541), and Abas (3.286), the one that was set up as a trophy at
Actium, aere cauou clipeum.
11. G. Pasquali, Orazio Lirico (Florence, 1920), 266, comments that they are the saviours
of the ships which she destroys.
12. E. Adelaide Hahn, ‘Horace’s Odes to Vergil’, T.A.Ph.A. 76 (1945) xxxii, finds Horace
especially influenced by the Aeolus episode in Aeneid 1 and the Daedalus passage in Aeneid
6.
10. The antithesis of frail craft and stormy sea has been a commonplace since the *Odyssey*, and we find it in *Aen.* 3.191 *uastumque caua trabe currimus aequor*, when the Trojans put out from Crete and head for the open sea.

11. For *pelagus* and *ratis* in the same line see *Aen.* 5.8 *ut pelagus tenuere rates*.

12. The southerly gale that brought Danae to Italy is *praecipiti Noto* (7.411), and the same wind is *Africus* in 1.86.

13. The northerly appears in the abl. sing. *Aquilone* in 1.102 and 5.2, the plural in 1.391, 3.285, and 4.310. The concept of winds from different quarters raging in conflict occurs in 1.85-6 *una Eurusque Notusque ruunt creberque procellis Africus*.

14. The Hyades are included in Iopas’ song of the cosmos as *pluuias Hyadas* (1.744), and the same line recurs when Palinurus observes the sky to see whether conditions are favourable for crossing from Greece to Italy (3.516). The metaphor of *rabies* for stormy weather is used by Virgil when Neptune assures Venus he can calm a raging sea, *rabiem tantam caelique marisque* (5.802). The Greek name for the southerly occurs at 1.85, 1.108, 2.417, 6.355, 7.411.

16. The notion of the wind also calming the sea (by ceasing to blow) is an aspect of the powers given to Aeolus by Jupiter: *et mulcere dedit fluctus et tollere uento* (1.66). Cf. *Ecl.* 2.26 *cum placidum uentis staret mare*.


18. Virgil uses *monstra* to cover all marine life, apparently, in Anchises’ catalogue of living creatures: *et quae marmoreo fert monstra sub aequore pontus* (6.729). But they were real monsters that panicked Hippolytus’ horses, *iuuenem monstri pauidi effudere marinis* (7.780). The attendants of Neptune are called *immania cete* (5.822). Palinurus even calls the sea itself *monstrum*, to stress the dangers of that element: *mene huic confidere monstro?* (5.849).

20. The promontory of Ceraunia is the point from which Aeneas starts on the shortest crossing to Italy: *provehimur pelago uicina Ceraunia iuxta* (3.506). Horace’s *Acroceranui* is a new coinage, which looks like a reflection of Virgil’s *alta Ceraunia* in *Geo.* 1.332.

21. The violent splitting off of Sicily from Italy is described with the same verb *abscidit* in *Aen.* 3.417-8; *uenit medio ui pontus et undis Hesperium Siculo latus abscidit*.

22. Virgil’s *Oceanus* is never a part of the Mediterranean, but either the god or the far east or west, or the horizon against which the heavenly bodies rise and set. Horace’s innovation is, however, in keeping with the epic character of the poem.

23. The emphatic *impiae* may be seen as the negation of the theme of *pietas*, which pervades the *Aeneid*. 

24. Virgil has *ratis* and *uada* in the same line in Turnus’ despairing cry to the 13. I owe this comment, as well as some other useful suggestions, to Mr R.P. Bond, who sees the possibility of some grim irony if Horace is imputing impiety to Virgil’s poetic voyage, which is itself filled with examples of piety.
winds, *ferte ratem saeuisque uadis immittite syrtis* (10.678). The context of drifting to disaster seems to match Horace's theme.

25. The element of hybris in the word *audax* is well illustrated by Virgil's application of it to Turnus (9.3 and 126, 10.276) and to the Rutuli (7.409 and 475, 9.519).

26. The *uetitum nefas* that men commit is also illustrated by the crimes that Aeneas sees being punished in Tartarus, e.g. 6.623-4

hic thalamum inuasit natae uetitosque hymenaeos;

ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti.

31. Virgil uses *incumbere* to describe a vigorous effort or a violent assault, as that of the winds on the sea (1.84, 12.367) or of warriors on the enemy (9.791).14

33. Virgil also uses *corripio* to describe a quick movement, e.g. *corripuit sese* (6.472, 11.462), *corripuere uiam* (1.418), *campum corripuere* (5.144-5), *corripiunt spatia* (5.316; cf. 6.634). With *gradus*, however, Virgil has *celebrare* (4.641), and in the opposite sense *continere* (3.598).

34. Daedalus is introduced at Cumae after his adventurous flight, *praepetibus pennis ausus se credere caelo* (6.15).


38. The assault on the sky and the threat to Jupiter suggest the Giants *coniuratos caelum rescindere fratres* in Geo. 1.280, or the Aloides *qui manibus magnum rescindere caelum adgressi superisque Iouem detrudere regnis* in Aen. 6.583-4.

40. Virgil has several references to Jupiter's thunderbolt, especially as a weapon of punishment, e.g. Anchises' recollection of the bolt that crippled him (2.648-9), and the Giants *fulmine deiecti* (6.581).

Many of these similarities could, of course, be fortuitous. But, even so, it seems reasonable to argue that (a) several of the parallels are too particular and too uncommon to be mere coincidences, e.g. the protection of Venus, the Aeolus episode, the wind Iapyx, the shield of bronze, the stormy seas and battling winds, the monsters, Ceraunia, *abscidit*; (b) the poetic level of the ode is so consistently high as to be suggestive of epic, and the language is markedly Virgilian; (c) the themes of the ode are to a large extent the themes of some notable episodes of the *Aeneid*, especially in Books 1, 3, 5 and 6. Virgil's voyage from Italy to Greece is in fact Aeneas's in reverse.

The allegory, then, would mean that Horace views the composition of the *Aeneid* with admiration for his friend's courage in undertaking it, sympathy for the arduous effort and endurance involved in the writing of such a long and lofty poem, and fear that the inspiration may falter and the poem be either a failure or an unfinished piece of work. Such a result would be disastrous for the 14. M. Owen Lee, *Word Sound and Image in the Odes of Horace* (Ann Arbor, 1969), 19-20, thinks of these fevers as 'malevolent powers settling like birds of ill omen upon their victim'.
reputation of a poet who had made his name with the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*. Virgil had once before put the temptation behind him, representing his decision as a warning from Apollo (*Ecl. 6. 3-5*). And after he had embarked on his epic, he sometimes despaired of ever bringing it to a satisfactory completion, if we are to believe Macrobius when he records Virgil’s remark to Augustus: *tanta incognata res est ut paene uitio mentis tantum opus ingressus mihi uidear* (*Sat. 1.24.11*).

If Virgil felt this way about his *Aeneid*, he was likely to have the heartfelt sympathy of Horace, who consistently employs the *recusatio* technique to avoid the task of immortalising the achievements of Augustus and his ministers. In the case of Agrippa he refers that stalwart leader to Varius, the acknowledged master of epic, not to Virgil, whose success lay in pastoral and Hesiodic poetry, themes of the individual, the countryside and peace. Others, like Propertius, might hail the new composition as something greater than the *Iliad*, but Horace, the anti-Propertian, must have watched the progress of the work with mixed feelings.

The question may now be asked whether Horace is likely to have written a completely allegorical poem without any hint of the real meaning behind it. Allegory was already familiar to Latin writers as a kind of extended metaphor. As Cicero puts it in the *De Oratore* 3.166: *non est in uno verbo translato, sed ex pluribus continuatis conectitur, ut aliquid dicatur, aliquid intellegendum sit*. Cicero illustrates first with a simple shipwreck metaphor from an early drama, then with another dramatic fragment of two lines representing an unruly character as an animal that needs to be tamed. Cf. *Orator* 94. Quintilian (8.6.44) illustrates *allegoria* by referring to Horace, *Odes* 1.14, the whole poem, Lucretius’s passage on the poet roaming about the haunts of the Muses (1.926-30), and Virgil, *Geo. 2.541-2*, where poetic composition is represented as driving a chariot across the plain.

Horace’s ship of state allegory in 1.14, therefore, offers the most obvious parallel, but other odes show a similar use of this figure, most notably 2.19, which represents the poetic experience entirely in the allegorical form of a Bacchic orgy, and 3.25, a similar allegory, but with three lines (4-6) revealing the reality behind it. In other odes Horace sometimes extends a metaphor to such length that it is perhaps better described as an allegorical passage, e.g. the interwoven sea-metaphor of the Pyrrha ode (1.5.6-8, 11-12, 13-16), or the swan-change that makes the poet immortal (2.20.1-5, 9-16), or the fable of the

15. A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1965), 11, quotes Goethe in a letter to Schiller: ‘I certainly do not know myself well enough to be sure if I could write a real tragedy. I am frightened even to undertake it, and am almost convinced that I might destroy myself in the attempt.’ Horace may have been similarly afraid that the composition of the *Aeneid* might destroy Virgil. Perhaps it did.

16. Propertius 2.34.66.
wonder-child (3.4.9-20). Horace slips easily into this way of writing, and his poet friends would have been well aware of it.

Horace gives us the ship of poetry again in 4.15.3-4; *ne parua Tyrrenenum per aequor uela darem*, and it had, in fact, as W.S. Anderson has pointed out, been a familiar metaphor since Pindar. In the eleventh Pythian, for example, he breaks off to observe that he is drifting from his course (39-40), and in the third Nemean he asks himself to what foreign land he is altering course (26-7). The metaphor was certainly well established in Augustan poetry. Virgil regards even the *Georgics* as a daring voyage when he appeals for favour: *da facilem cursum atque audacibus adnue coeptis* (1.40), and *pelagoque uolans da uela patenti* (2.41). In Book 4 he regrets he has no time to spend on gardens because he is nearing the end of his voyage: *uela traham et terris festinam aduertere proram* (4.117).

Similarly Propertius is advised by Apollo to row a safe course close to the shore and leave the open sea to the majority:

\[
\text{non est ingenii cumba grauanda tui:} \\
\text{alter remus aquas alter tibi radat harenas,} \\
\text{tutus eris: medio maxima turba mari est.} \quad (3.3.22-4)
\]

In a *recusatio* to Maecenas he repeats the same antithesis:

\[
\text{quid mihi scribendi tam uastum mittis in aequor?} \\
\text{non sunt apta meae grandia uela rati.} \quad (3.9.3-4)
\]

Later in the same poem he contrasts the open sea with the little stream:

\[
\text{non ego uelifera tumidum mare findo carina:} \\
\text{tota sub exiguo flumine nostra mora est.} \quad (35-6)
\]

After Horace we find Ovid developing the same metaphor and giving characteristically new twists to the old convention. The poem sets sail: *uelis, elegi, maioribus itis* (*Fasti* 2.3); the winds are favourable: *dum licet et spirant flamina, nauis eat* (ibid. 4.18); the craft is in danger (*Tr.* 2.329-30):

\[
\text{non ideo debet pelago se credere, si qua} \\
\text{audet in exiguo ludere cymba lacu.}
\]

Finally completed, the poem arrives safely in harbour (*Rem. Am.* 811-2):

\[
\text{hoc opus exegi: fessae date sera carinae;} \\
\text{contigimus portus, quo mihi cursus erat.}
\]

The allegory of the ship of poetry was therefore current coin among the Latin poets at the time when Horace was composing his odes, and it seems not unreasonable to suppose that he was only developing at greater length and with greater power an already familiar metaphor. More particularly he was taking up Virgil’s own image from the *Georgics* and applying it with even more urgency to the *Aeneid*. 
