
MÉAI NUCESQUE

A Newsletter for Classics at the University of Dallas

Horace's Conception of the Divine

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Horace was an intellectual atheist in that, through the application of his reason, he did not believe in the gods, but in the core of his being, he acknowledged the existence of a divine entity.

Ode 1.28, the Archytas ode, illustrates most fully Horace's attitude toward death. The speaker of this ode is a dead man who is knowledgeable and wise, yet is childishly full of pain because he desires a proper burial. This poem rings with irony as the speaker, with a tone of utter authority, taunts the ancient Pythagorean, Archytas, at his tomb:

You the measurer of the sea and earth and sands
without number, Archytas, a small gift of exiguous
dust confines you near the Matine shore, it benefits
you nothing to have tried the airy homes and to have
run through the round poles although your mind will
die. (*Car.* 1.28.1-6)

The speaker taunts Archytas because his attempts to understand the afterlife are as futile as counting grains of sand. Despite Archytas' attempts to comprehend the afterlife, both his body and mind perished and ceased to exist.

At the end of the poem, the speaker ceases to goad Archytas and begins to plea pitifully for three handfuls of dust to bury his body: "Quamquam festinas, non est mora longa; licebit / iniecto ter pulvere curras" ("Although you hasten, there is no long delay; may you rush after the dust has been sprinkled thrice"; *Car.* 1.28.35-6). For the speaker, this simple rite is the only way to tame inescapable and terrible death. Horace, however, seems to taunt both Archytas and the speaker. The small gift of dust symbolizes all that the "nervos atque cutem" (*Car.* 1.28.13) will become ultimately. Archytas is now a handful of dust confined by the Matine shore, and yet, in the final lines of a poem, the speaker prays for someone to sprinkle three handfuls of dust over his body. Horace accepts the death of both body and soul and propels no doctrinal belief in an afterlife. There is no consolation of an afterlife, and all one's preparation for death amount to nothing.

For Horace, the most appropriate way to view death is through passive acceptance. The most striking image in the Archytas ode is the passing sailor. This passing sailor becomes the representation of mankind. For Horace, life is a navigation. All mankind are sailors navigating through the sea of life, and readers of the poem have to identify with this passing sailor. Horace offers no answer as to what is the final destination of life's navigation. There is no afterlife but only a great nothingness.

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The Iota Subscript Considered

By Rebekah Spearman

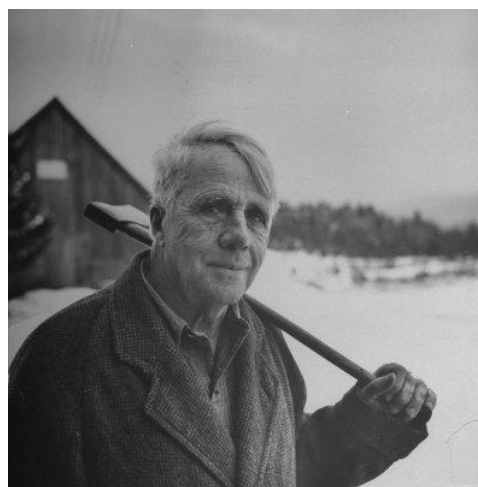
Such a tiny little detail, it would seem easy to forget (not that we Classics students at U.D. have ever made such an amateur error), but the iota subscript possesses charm in ways apart from philological interest. In his delightful little poem, Robert Frost captures the significant insignificance of the iota subscript.

Iota Subscript

By Robert Frost

Seek not in me the big I capital,
Not yet the little dotted in me seek.
If I have in me any I at all,
'Tis the iota subscript of the Greek.

So small am I as an attention beggar.
The letter you will find me subscript to
Is neither alpha, eta, nor omega,
But upsilon which is the Greek for you.



The poet, Robert Frost.

Image from <<http://poemshape.wordpress.com/2011/01/09/the-making-of-robert-frosts-nothing-gold-can-stay/>>.

Horace and the Divine, Part 2

Horace's passive resignation toward death, his belief in the ultimate destruction of both body and soul, and his disbelief in an afterlife combine both Epicurean and atheistic philosophies. Horace's mind was entrapped between these two philosophies. The final destination of his navigation of life was toward an unknown horizon, and he was racked with a sincere fear of death. However, in his heart and soul, he transcends these fears and is immortalized in his poetry. Horace acknowledges that there is a higher being who has granted him the gift of poetry. In some of his poems, he makes genuine prayers to God of faith, love, and thanksgiving for the gift of his vocation as a poet.

Horace writes of this transcendence in ode 2.20, the final poem of his second book of odes, and he describes his transformation into a white bird: "Iam iam resident cruribus asperae / pelles, et album mutor in alitem / superne, nascunturque leves / per digitos umerosque plumae" ("Already, already rough fleeces settle on my legs, and above I am changed into a white bird, and through my fingers and shoulders light feathers spring forth"; *Car.* 2.20.9-12). For Horace, the white bird specifically represents his soul as a poet. This metamorphosis illustrates the liberation of Horace's poetic soul from human confines. The soul of the poet takes flight and will escape death, and his poetry will be immortal. He transcends his fear of death through his poetry, and nothing restrains his soul from taking flight: "Non ego pauperum / sanguis parentum, non ego quem vocas, / dilecte Maecenas, obibo / nec Stygia cohibebor unda" ("Not I the blood of poor parents, not I whom you call, beloved Maecenas, will die nor will I be confined by the waves of Styx"; *Car.* 2.20.4-8). Even though he believes his body and mind will sink into nothingness after death, the poetic part of his soul, in the image of white bird, lives on through his poetry. Indeed, in the last stanza of the poem, Horace insists that nobody mourn his death: "Absint inani funere neniae / luctusque turpes et querimoniae / compesce clamorem ac sepulcri / mitte supervacuos honores" ("Let there be no wailings of an empty funeral and ugly groans and complaining; restrain the cry and dismiss the superfluous honors of the tomb"; *Car.* 2.20.21-22).

Horace's poetic heart and soul grappled against his mind that there must be a divine entity who endowed him with his gift as a poet, and he acknowledges that there must be some kind of higher being who granted him this poetic soul. Through his poetry, his poetic soul, in the form of a bird, soars to the ends of the earth, which could not have happened merely through human ingenuity: "Me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum / Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimo / noscent Geloni, me peritus / discet Hiber Rhodantique potor" ("Me the Colchian and the Dacian who hides his fear of the Marsian cavalry, and the farthest Gelonians will know, the learned Spaniard and drinker of the Rhone will know me"; *Car.* 2.20.17-20). Horace is a skilled, poetic craftsman and recognizes with awe that he's created something immortal. His artistic greatness, however, springs from some kind of divine source. This is not a laudatory poem about his greatness. It is striking that in ode 1.3, Horace condemns the flight of Daedalus: "Expertus vacuum Daedalus aera / pennis non homini datis" ("Daedalus tried the empty air on wings not given to men"; *Car.* 1.3.34-35). In ode 2.20, he associates himself with Icarus, yet Horace stretches higher than Icarus. Horace is "iam Daedaleo notior Icaro" (*Car.* 2.20.13).

Horace, who condemns people who seek the heavens in their folly, now rises to new heights in his vocation as a poet.

In his soul, Horace attributes his poetic gift to the gods or a higher being. Some of his poems, such as ode 4.3, are prayers of gratitude to the gods: "Totum muneris hoc tui est, / quod monstror digito praetereuntium / Romanae fidicen lyrae: / quod spiro et placeo, si placeo, tuum est" ("All this is your gift, that I am pointed at by the finger of the passers-by as the harpist of the Roman harp; that I breathe and please, if I please, is your gift"; *Car.* 4.3.21-24). These final lines of ode 4.3 show that Horace attributed his life to a higher being, and his heart cries out to a living God. Whether intentional or not, this poem becomes a prayer of thanksgiving. Horace never adhered to any formal code of religious belief, but he knew that there was something larger than his own paltry existence. Some source of divinity bestowed upon him his vocation to become a poet. Horace was not wholly Epicurean or atheistic. He seemed to be caught up in the philosophies of the Roman world and wavered between his understanding of the world through his intellect and his understanding of the world through his soul. Once he transcends the tumult of this world and liberates himself from the confines of the mind through his poetry, his poems emanate his love for poetry and humanity. Without that love which radiates through his poetry and comes from God, Horace's poetry would not be remembered or have spread to all corners of the world, but he would be just another Epicurean and atheistic poet.

Philology: Grimm's Law

The Introduction to Smyth's *Greek Grammar* cites an interesting rule. "An important relation of Greek to English," says Section B., "...is illustrated by Grimm's law of the 'permutation of consonants'..." One could use this rule to see how certain English words are more closely related to Greek words than a cursory look suggests. Recognizing such connections could augment one's mental store of vocabulary immensely. Below is the table that Smyth uses to show Grimm's rule:

π = f	τ = th	κ = h	β = p	δ = t
πατήρ	τρεις	καρδιά	τύρπη	δύο
father	three	heart	thorp	two
γ = c (k)	φ = b	θ = d	χ = g	
ἀγρός	φέρω	θύρᾱ	χίην	
acre	bear	door	goose	

Text from

http://www.col.org/s/smyth/grammar/html/smyth_front_matter_uni.htm#introduction.

Answers to October's Crossword

Down

1. *Carthago*
2. *Vae*
5. *Arma*
8. *Scipio*

Across

3. *Nugae*
4. *Dante*
6. *Diligite*
7. *Octavianus*
9. *Rostra*