THAT ST(R)AIN AGAIN: BLOOD, WATER, AND GENERIC ALLUSION IN HORACE'S BANDUSIA ODE

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HORACE'S VIVID PICTURE of the blood sacrifice to the spring of Bandusia has left many readers feeling somewhat uneasy, for while animal sacrifices appear elsewhere in the *Odes*,[1] none matches this for its pathos or detail:

> O fons Bandusiae, splendidior vitro,
> dulci digne mero non sine floribus,
> cras donaberis haedo,
> cui frons turgida cornibus
>
> primis et venerem et proelia destinat.
> frustra: nam gelidos inficiet tibi
> rubro sanguine rivos
> lascivi suboles gregis. (*Carm*. 3.13.1–8)
>
> O spring of Bandusia, brighter than glass, worthy of sweet wine and flowers: tomorrow you will be presented with a kid whose forehead, swelling with first horns, destines him for both love and battles—but in vain, for to honour you the offspring of the wanton herd will dye your icy waters with his crimson blood.

Hence the protest or surprise expressed at this allegedly offensive intrusion of blood into an otherwise idyllic scene: "Who wants a drink out of the fountain of Bandusia after that?" (Campbell 1924, 2); "[Horace] visualizes with aesthetic relish the mingling of the cool water and the red blood. . . . [His] behaviour was strange even by ancient criteria" (Nisbet 1962, 198); "somewhat macabre" (Williams 1969, 89); "the scandal of the sacrificial kid, whose death is dwelt upon . . . with a cruel brilliance quite out of proportion to any decorative needs" (Wilson 1968, 289).[2] Others

[1] *Carm*. 1.4.11–12, 2.17.30–32, 3.22.7–8, 3.23.9–13, 4.2.53–60; cf. *Anth. Pal*. 6.336 (Theocritus).

[2] Further sentiments of this kind, as well as attempts by modern translators to mitigate Horace's realism, are assembled by Hexter (1987, 132–35).

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have attempted to domesticate the sacrifice, urging that the ancients were less sentimental in these matters and justifying the description as rustic realism.[3] But neither view accounts adequately for the densely suggestive detail or the perceptible emphasis on the blood offering—in a word, for the poetic intensity of these lines.

The sacrifice begins to make sense when we explore its metaphorical possibilities and integrate it into the ode's thematic and intellectual design.[4] Recent criticism has emphasized the metapoetic dimension of 3.13, interpreting Horace's homage to the spring as a tribute to the poetry which secures it a place among the celebrated fountains of Greek and Roman literature: "fies nobilium tu quoque fontium / me dicente cavis inpositam ilicem / saxis, unde loquaces / lymphae desiliunt tuae" (13–16; "you too will take your place among the famous springs when I celebrate the ilex set upon the hollow rocks, from which your clear-voiced waters come cascading down"). Further, since springs and water have a long metaphorical association with poetry (cf. below, note 12), the literal shades off easily into the literary, and the *fons* reflects the ideals and aspirations of Horace's own lyric art.[5] From this perspective, the blood sacrifice too acquires a metaphorical nuance. Here is Steele Commager: "Readers have often been repelled by the details of the kid's sacrifice (6–8). Perhaps the description is not there for its realistic effect alone. Destined for love and battle, the 'offspring of the wanton flock' epitomizes life's comprehensive vitality, and as his warm blood mingles with the lucid water it is easy to sense a suggestion of the transformation of life into art" (Commager 1962, 323–24). Ralph Hexter continues on this trajectory: "The image of the red blood of the goat staining the cold spring water reflects the transmutation of life into poetry. . . . I believe a close reading of the poem supports a further insight: that Horace means to show us how life is transferred to the water of poetry, and by showing us how it is, he shows us that it is."[6] Most recently, Gregson Davis has suggested a further association: "Unmixed wine, flowers, and young animal constitute the *sine quibus non* of the banqueting apparatus. . . . Horace's *fons* is to be honored with the irreducible tokens of convivial

[3] West 1967, 129–30; Nussbaum 1971; Syndikus 2001, 133–34. In a slightly different vein, see also Fraenkel 1957, 203.

[4] A convincing metaphorical reading of these lines needs to take into account the intention of the ode as a whole: this, I think, is reason enough for scepticism about attempts to read sexual symbolism into the sacrifice, as in Smith 1976 and Minadeo 1982, 203–6.

[5] So (e.g.) Schmidt 1977, 111–12, and 1997, 117–18; Armstrong 1989, 109.

[6] Hexter 1987, 132. Similarly Armstrong 1989, 109: "The bloodshed is the sacrifice of reality to create art from it."

poetry. This ensemble of tokens, and not the presumed reference to an obscure festival, is what principally determines the speaker's choice of offerings." And once the choice of offerings has established the lyric orientation, the goat's death suggests to Davis also the mortality topos or the "dark background," typically a foil to the convivial motifs in the context of the *carpe diem* argument (Davis 1991, 128).

Life transmuted and eternalized as art (Commager, Hexter) in a ceremony whose tokens evoke the lyricist's specific medium (Davis)—the programmatic and metapoetic intent of the ode seems unambiguous. From this literary perspective, the sacrifice with its violent commingling of blood and water acquires a further symbolic and self-referential role within the poem, functioning as generic allusion in a way that complements the final strophe's confident assertion.

The Bandusia ode, with its promise of fame for the spring, touches on the wider theme of literary immortality and the poet's artistic aspirations (e.g., *Carm*. 1.32.1–4, 2.20, 3.30, 4.8, 4.9) and can usefully be read in relation to those programmatic declarations.[7] Poetry's power to immortalize is a motif first articulated in Homeric epic (κλέα ἀνδρῶν ἀείδειν: "to sing the glorious deeds of heroes") and archaic Greek lyric,[8] whence it extends also to all the other genres. But the distinctive association with the *genus grande* is seldom far from the mind of the Augustan poet experimenting with new forms, and it appears typically in programmatic statements where he vindicates his achievement or choice of literary medium, claiming equality in this respect with the old masters: thus Horace in the above texts; thus also Propertius *ludibundus* in his best programmatic pieces. A traditional criterion is cited to legitimate bold innovation or even subversion of the tradition.[9] There is an intentional

[7] Fraenkel (1957, 203 and 423) notes aptly that 3.13 looks forward to the grander claims of 4.8; Commager (1962, 323) remarks that "we are halfway to the proud declarations of the epilogue (*C*. 3.30.1ff.)." Cf. also Nisbet 1962, 199; Brouwers 1967, 136–37.

[8] E.g., Hom. *Il*. 6.357–58, *Od*. 3.203–204, 8.579–80, 24.197–98; Pind. *O*. 10.91–96, 11.4–6, *P*. 3.112–15, 6.5–14, *N*. 7.11–16, *I*. 4.37–42, 7.16–19; Hdt. 1.1; Cic. *Arch*. 20, 24; Verg. *Aen*. 9.446–49; Hor. *Ep*. 2.1.245–50; with Stroh 1971, 235–49.

[9] Cf. Fraenkel 1957, 422 (à propos *Carm*. 4.8): "The idea that a lyric poem could secure lasting fame, though familiar to the classical age of Greece, had no roots in the life of Roman poetry as known to Horace's contemporaries. To make so high a claim was, in a sceptical world, extremely hazardous." Fraenkel 1957, 424 n. 1: "It is, perhaps, significant that in iv.8 the only poet specially mentioned is Ennius. . . . Epic poetry had the privilege, even in Rome, of immortalizing men. iv.9 makes Horace's new claim explicit: not only epic poetry can be a lasting monument, but lyrics as well." So too Propertius, making similar claims for his humble love elegy, wittily challenges the primacy of the *genus grande* at 2.1.1–16, 2.12.21–24, and especially in 3.1 and 3.2.

irony involved here, for characteristically Horace defines his own Callimachean *musa tenuis* ("slight muse") in pointed opposition to the loftier genres, invoking the conventional hierarchy of literary forms (*Carm*. 1.6, 2.1.37–40, 2.12, 3.3.69–72, 4.2, 4.15.1–4; *Ep*. 2.1.250–59); but when he declares that his lyre too can confer immortality (on himself or on its subject), the modest and self-deprecating pose of the *recusationes* is discarded and his un-Callimachean claims now duly solemnized by reminiscences of the generic "other": Pindar (*Carm*. 2.20 and 3.30), Ennius (4.8), and Homer (4.9). At these moments the lyricist rises to the level of the *maiore poeta plectro*,[10] a role he elsewhere playfully disavows. Horace, that is, simultaneously evokes and confounds accepted hierarchies and classifications to make the point that the Callimachean can vie with the *os magna sonaturum* ("the voice that is to utter mighty things")—and even trump the *magnus poeta* at his own game.

In 3.13 too we have a sense of lyric rising above its customary register, a hint of the *paulo maiora canamus* ("let us attempt a rather more exalted theme"), a suggestion of this paradoxical blending of Callimachean and "epicizing" strains in Horatian lyric—not indeed as overt as in the later and grander statements, yet clearly anticipating those confident claims. A few details deserve mention as generic coordinates. Horace's spring, first, is *splendidior vitro* ("brighter than glass"), and whether we interpret this as referring to translucence or reflectiveness,[11] an allusion to the Callimachean ideal of stylistic purity seems inescapable: Δηοῖ δ' οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι, / ἀλλ' ἥτις καθαρή τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει / πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβὰς ἄκρον ἄωτον (*Ap.* 110–12; "The Melissae do not bring Deo water from any stream, but such as issues pure and undefiled from a holy spring, a slender trickle, essence of perfection").[12] Next, the tokens with which the spring is to be honored evoke the lyric symposium and so have a clear generic reference (see above), as indeed the *locus amoenus* suggests the distinctive Horatian *Dichterlandschaft* (cf. *Carm*. 1.1.30–31, 1.17.17–20, 4.3.10–12).

[10] Cf. Quintilian's remark (10.1.96) on Horace, *nam et insurgit aliquando* ("for at times he rises to a loftier grandeur").

[11] For *splendidior* as "more reflective," see esp. Williams 1969, 88, and Hexter 1987, 138.

[12] Thus Armstrong 1989, 109: "Horace is talking about a real fountain, almost certainly at his farm. But more than a fountain is meant: the Callimachean 'pure fountain' of poetry is symbolized here." On the Callimachean associations of the *fons*, cf. further Hor. *Carm*. 1.26.6, "fontibus integris" ("fresh fountains"), with Nisbet and Hubbard 1970, 305; Prop. 3.1.3, "primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos" ("I lead the way, a priest from an unsullied fountain"), with Fedeli 1985, 47–49; Wimmel 1960, 222–33; Hexter 1987, 136.

But as the ode progresses its tenor modulates through hymnic aretalogy to the spring's final apotheosis: "fies nobilium tu quoque fontium, / me dicente" ("You too will take your place among the famous springs when I celebrate"). *Dicere* ("to tell of") in particular, poetic equivalent to *canere* ("to sing, celebrate") or *memorare* ("to relate, narrate") and implying elevated praise,[13] gives that final prediction an epic tinge: the lyricist immortalizes the spring in the same way that the epicist preserves the memory of his subject.

This "epic" strain that comes out most clearly at the climax of the lyric homage is in fact anticipated already in the ode's opening strophes, and here two points may be made. It has been claimed, first, that Horace's close description of the kid calls attention to the value of the choice sacrificial victim.[14] Perhaps so, but that prosaic interpretation overlooks other symbolic possiblities. Of particular interest is the detail "cui frons turgida cornibus / primis et venerem et proelia destinat" ("whose forehead, swelling with first horns, destines him for both love and battles"): beyond just evoking the kid's "youthful pranks" (Fraenkel) or even epitomizing "life's comprehensive vitality" (Commager), the conjunction *et venerem et proelia* suggests also a generic reference. In terms of signature themes, love is to lyric as war is to epic: the interpenetration of the two (generically opposed) thematic markers effectively foreshadows the eventual shift to a higher register at the poem's apex.[15]

Closely related is the vivid and much criticized detail "nam gelidos inficiet tibi / rubro sanguine rivos." The victim's blood in the crystalline water produces an arresting contrast, or rather set of contrasts, with Horace condensing three antitheses in two pairs: blood/water, red/[clear] and [hot]/cold.[16] Beyond just its aesthetic effect, the focusing antithesis again hints at a generic contrast—for if the clear spring water evokes the Callimachean ideal, *inficiet . . . rubro sanguine rivos* points symmetrically to the *genus grande* via the striking detail of the blood coloured water, typologically correlative to the "bloodstained water" motif of high epic and panegyric. A hint in Homer's Scamander episode at *Iliad* 21.324–25, ἦ, καὶ ἐπῶρτ' Ἀχιλῆι κυκώμενος ὑψόσε θύων, / μορμύρων ἀφρῷ τε καὶ αἵ-

[13] E.g., Verg. *Ecl*. 6.6, *Aen*. 7.41–42; Hor. *S*. 2.1.11, *Carm*. 1.6.5, 1.7.9, 1.12.13 and 25, 2.12.10, 3.25.7; Prop. 1.7.1, 1.9.9, 2.10.4, 2.34.28 and 62, 3.17.21.

[14] Kiessling and Heinze 1968, 317; Fraenkel 1957, 203.

[15] The point is valid even if we read the phrase as hendiadys and will constitute another feature of Horatian generic sleight of hand: the characteristic assimilation of the "other" genre. On the technique, see Davis 1991, 11–77.

[16] So Hexter 1987, 137 (noting also earlier commentators); Schmidt 1990, 66–68.

μ α τ ι καὶ νεκύεσσι ("so he spoke, and rushed upon Achilles in a raging flood, surging aloft, roaring with foam and blood and corpses") is successively elaborated in the Latin literary imagination from Accius to Silius Italicus to become virtually an emblem of the grand heroics of epic.[17] And when Roman historical epic adds naval battles to the traditional repertoire of themes, the image is adapted accordingly: now it is the sea that is stained with blood, but plainly the vivid detail has the same hyperbolical effect as before.[18] Three such instances in Horace's odes deserve brief mention. At *Carmina* 3.6.33–36, the bloodstained sea, periphrasis for naval triumphs in the first Punic war, is grouped with other monumental victories to emblematize the heroic temper of bygone generations: "non his iuventus orta parentibus / infecit aequor sanguine Punico / Pyrrhumque et ingentem cecidit / Antiochum Hannibalemque

[17] Cf. Accius 322–23 Ribbeck 2d ed., "Scamandriam undam salso sanctam obtexi sanguine, / atque acervos alta in amni corpore explevi hostico" ("Scamander's sacred stream I covered over with brackish blood, and in the deep river piled up heaps of enemy carcasses"); Catul. 64.357–60, "testis erit magnis virtutibus unda Scamandri, / quae passim rapido diffunditur Hellesponto, / cuius iter caesis angustans corporum acervis / alta tepefaciet permixta flumina caede" ("as witness to his great deeds of valour will be Scamander's river, which fans out and feeds the swirling Hellespont; choking its course with heaped corpses, he [Achilles] will make the deep streams warm with mingled gore"); Sen. *Tro*. 187, "tardus cruento Xanthus erravit vado" ("Xanthus wandered slowly along with bloody stream"); *Ag*. 213–14, "non Xanthus armis corpora immixta aggerens / fluctusque Simois caede purpureos agens" ("nor Xanthus, rolling down corpses and arms commingled, nor Simois, its waves running red with blood"). Subsequently also in epic μάχαι παραποτάμιοι ("riverside battles") at Stat. *Theb*. 1.38, 9.257–58; Sil. 4.592–93, 662–65, 6.12. The generic tenor of the motif can well be gauged from Prop. 3.3, a grand literary *recusatio* that programmatically confronts epic and elegy ("parvaque tam magnis admoram fontibus ora," 3.3.5 ["and to such potent springs I had set my feeble lips"]): a catalogue of epic themes the elegist is urged to avoid culminates in a picture of the blood–drenched Rhine: "barbarus aut Suevo perfusus sanguine Rhenus / saucia maerenti corpora vectet aqua" (3.3.45–46; "or the wild Rhine, drenched with Swabian blood, sweeping along the mangled corpses in its sorrowing wave"). The bloodstained river reappears in Ovid in relation to Augustan military triumphs (again an elevated register): *Tr*. 4.2.37–38, "tot amnes / plena ferae caedis, plena cruoris erant" ("so many rivers were filled with wild slaughter, filled with gore"); 4.2.41–42, "cornibus hic fractis viridi male tectus ab ulva / decolor ipse suo sanguine Rhenus erat" ("this thing with broken horns and sorry covering of green sedge was the Rhine himself, discoloured by his own blood"); *Pont*. 3.4.107–8, "squalidus inmissos fracta sub harundine crines / Rhenus et infectas sanguine portet aquas" ("let the squalid Rhine, with locks trailing through broken reeds, bear waters dyed with blood"). Frost (1991, 257) well remarks that "[b]lood–stained rivers were . . . an almost generic feature of epic description." The stylized poetic accounts of course reflect the realities of ancient warfare (e.g., Thuc. 7.84.5).

[18] Luc. 3.572–73; Sil. 14.485–86, 556.

dirum" ("not from parents like these was born the youth that stained the sea with Punic blood and struck down Pyrrhus and the mighty Antiochus and Hannibal the dire"). In the hierarchy of genres, such pathos rises above the humbler strains of lyric, and indeed Horace twice includes the image among related martial themes as generic foil to his own lighter measures:

> qui gurges aut quae flumina lugubris
> ignara belli? *quod mare Dauniae*
> *non decoloravere caedes?*
> quae caret ora cruore nostro?
>
> sed ne *relictis*, Musa procax, *iocis*
> Ceae retractes munera neniae:
> mecum Dionaeo sub antro
> quaere *modos leviore plectro* (*Carm*. 2.1.33–40)
>
> What eddy or what rivers are untouched by dismal war? *What sea has not been discoloured by slaughtered Apulians?* What shore does not know our blood? But lest you *leave your playful themes,* wanton Muse, to attempt again a Cean dirge, come seek with me in some Dionean grotto *measures of lighter mood.*
>
> nolis longa ferae bella Numantiae
> nec durum Hannibalem nec *Siculum mare*
> *Poeno purpureum sanguine mollibus*
> aptari *citharae modis*. (*Carm*. 2.12.1–4)
>
> You would not wish to have fierce Numantia's tedious wars set to the *lyre's gentle measures,* or doughty Hannibal or *the Sicilian sea crimson with Punic blood.*

The explicit literary-generic contrast in these passages suggests that the epic complexion of the "bloodstained water" motif would have been readily recognized: the image here is practically a synecdoche for the genre from which it derives.

And this in turn bears on the Bandusia ode. Horace's homage to the *fons* is also a tribute to the poetry that will immortalize its subject. The ode that begins with the pure Callimachean waters and the emblems of lyric conviviality rises to an "epic" note with the promise of future fame for the spring. If beginning and end fix the ode's generic coordinates, the second strophe synthesizes the two voices: the spring's clear water stained with the kid's blood, literally an act of sacrifice, as metaphor suggests also the blending genres, the fusion of epic and lyric

strains, and to that extent effectively prefigures the "epic" prediction at the climax of the ode.[19]

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