

CYCLICAL METAPHORS AND THE POLITICS OF HORACE, *ODES* 1.4*

I am talking of the common life which is the real life and
not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*
(New York 1929) 198.

Spring's arrival invites hope, or freshens memories, of the renewal of life and love. That is, until one encounters the Horatian tradition of spring poems. For as Gregson Davis has recently reminded us, Horace's *carpe diem* poems do not involve simply an injunction to enjoy life.¹ In studying these poems as a generic mode, Davis locates an antinomy common to each. The *carpe diem* theme, he argues, represents a playing out of the psychological conflict present in every human being between recognizing one's human limits and denying the reality of death. Horace realizes this antinomy most clearly through the vehicle of nature, where the cyclical workings of the seasons form a contrast with the linear progression—and subsequent termination—of human life. According to this understanding of the *carpe diem* scheme, the onset of spring stirs up a particularly delusory sense of optimism.

The *carpe diem* motif finds its commonest manifestation in the odes describing the alternation of the seasons. In Davis' analysis, each seasonal ode of Horace shares a rhetorical progression by which a natural setting prompts human reflection. According to this schema, a description of nature initiates a two-step response. First, contemplation of seasonal change effects a recognition of the basic difference between the continually renewable seasons and human mortality. Then Horace resolves the anxiety of this contrast in the second step, by recourse to what Davis designates as the "symptotic gesture": that is, the injunction to maximize one's time while still alive—*carpe diem*. The apparent happiness expressed by this symptotic gesture is, therefore, always tempered by an awareness of human limits. Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think.

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¹ G. Davis, *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse* (Berkeley 1991) 146–50. Davis analyzes how *Carmen* 1.4 shares an infrastructure with other convivial poems of Horace and how this infrastructure relies upon the rhetoric of consolation for its main argument. He discusses in particular *Epode* 13 and *Carmina* 1.9, 1.11, 2.3, 2.7, 3.17, 3.29, 4.7, and 4.12.

I would like to inject a little cheerfulness into this bleak view—at least in so far as it concerns one ode, the well-known *solvitur acris hiems* (*Carmen* 1.4). The poem fits well Davis' general scheme: the description of spring (1–12) inspires sudden insight into mortality (13–15), an insight which then introduces an enumeration of earthly pleasures that will soon be lost (18–19). Yet, contrary to Davis' claims, the poet here does not follow a simple progression from psychological conflict to convivial resolution. An analysis of the thematic development, imagery, syntax, and meter of the poem renders a more optimistic reading, one that paradoxically discovers new life in the very contemplation of death. For the poem asserts that, although the individual lives of human beings may not renew themselves like the seasons, the combined life of humanity does. The poem's dominant metaphor of seasonal change, rather than providing a negative *comparandum*, in fact allows the reader to recover some of the hope that the poem would seem expressly to deny. And outside the world of the poem, this alternative vision of reality has ramifications for contemporary Roman politics. For, as I shall demonstrate after an analysis of the ode's formal elements, Horace's representation of temporal progression and seasonal change provides a counterpoint to the historical realities confronting the poem's addressee, Lucius Sestius, suffect consul of 23 B.C.E., the year in which Horace published his first three books of *Odes*.

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Rings and cycles dominate the ode's formal elements. On a structural level, the unfolding of the poem's themes suggests ring composition. As the ode opens, the arrival of spring causes human beings—the sailor, the herder, and the plowman—to resume work. The second four-line group leaves this human reality to show the gods both at play—Venus dances with her train of Nymphs and Graces—as well as at work—Vulcan inspects the forge of the Cyclopes. In the poem's central quatrain (lines 9–12), humans meet the divine, as garlanded banqueters propitiate the god Faunus. With the startling arrival of death, *pallida Mors*, at line 13, the union of divine and human continues, although this time the action is reversed: humans are sought by the gods. Death, the Manes, and Pluto overwhelm the ode's addressee Sestius.² Yet despite this disruption of lively

² Abundant scholarship has arisen in response to W. S. Landor's marginalia in his personal copy of Horace ("*pallida mors* has nothing to do with the above," first cited in A. Y. Campbell, *Horace: A New Interpretation* [London 1924] 78). Justification for Death's sudden entrance has been sought in external evidence (Greek precedent: R. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes I* [London 1970] 61, "one can hardly regard [Horace's line of thought] as uniquely original"; Faunus: C. Babcock, "The Role of Faunus in Horace, *Carmina* 1.4," *TAPA* 92 [1961] 13–19, and W. Barr, "Horace, *Odes* i.4," *CR* 12 [1962] 5–11), as well as in internal evidence (imagery and syntax: see esp. A. J. Woodman, "Horace's *Odes Diffugere nives* and

activity, the poem does not end with death. Instead, it adheres to its dominant metaphor, the renewal of the seasons; and a new cycle closes the ode as banqueting imagery heralds the renewal of love and sex. One may schematize the poem's thematic development as follows:

1-4	humans work >
5-8	gods play > gods work >
9-12	humans at "play" meet gods >
13-17	gods at "work" meet humans >
18-20	humans play

In the poem, the alternation of subject between the divine and the human and between work and play echoes the theme of change anticipated in the first verse (*vice*) and so suggests the alternation of the seasons. The progression creates what I would call an "open-ended ring composition." In other words, although the subject-matter comes around full circle, back to human beings, the final image contains potential to continue a new circle. For the poem ends by highlighting the springtime of a young person's life.

Other aspects of the poem's imagery develop in a similar series of antitheses. Ideas of release and constriction alternate: the loosening of winter (*solvitur*: 1) prompts the celebration of joined divinities (*iunctae*: 6), and of humans whose heads are "shackled" (*impedire*: 9) by the products of the freshly loosened earth (*solutae*: 10). With the subject of Death introduced, images of restraint recur (*vetat*: 15; *premet*: 16), only to be forgotten in the final distich, where Lycidas and his lovers escape the confines of Hades. Conflicting notions of release and constraint also occur within the verb forms of the single word *decere*. As part of the divine response to spring, the Graces provide with their vigorous dancing a "suitably charming" accompaniment (*decentes*: 6).³ In reference to human activity, by contrast, the word

Solvitur acris hiems," *Latomus* 31 [1972] 768-76, who cites among other works the earlier observations of S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* [New Haven 1962] 268-69, and N. Rudd, "Patterns in Horatian Lyric," *AJP* 81 [1960] 379-80; cf. also R. Nielsen and R. Solomon, "*Pallida Mors* and Broken Promises: Convention in Horace, *Odes* I.4," in C. Deroux ed., *Coll. Latomus* 206 [1989] 187-202). At the end of this paper I shall account for the poem's ambivalent representation of spring by focusing on the ode's historical addressee, Lucius Sestius.

³ The adjective *decentis*, first found in Horace (who uses it seven times), literally means "fitting" or "suitable," but soon acquired the meaning "beautiful, charming" (*TLL* 5.1.136.12-52). When applied to bodily movement, as here applied to the dancing Graces, the adjective suggests those types of gesture and motion "appropriate" to the occasion at hand (similar examples to that in Horace are listed at *TLL* 5.1.135.29-30, 57-60). Hence *decentes* here is not simply "a rather austere word for 'lovely'" (Nisbet/Hubbard [above, n.2] 65). Rather, the word introduces the idea of propriety both in nature and in human custom that is a common motif of the *carpe diem* poems and that will be further elaborated by the repeated use of *decet* at lines 9-11.

adopts a more restrained tone, as it describes in an impersonal construction the dutiful propriety of both the feast and the sacrifice to Faunus (*decet*: 9, 11). Light and dark also interchange regularly in the ode. The first four-line group, describing the disappearance of fields bright with snow (*canis albicant pruinis*: 4), precedes the next quatrain's darkness, as implied in the reference to an overhanging moon (5) and a subterranean workshop (7–8). Daylight then follows, as it shines off a head glistening with perfumes (*nitidum*: 9) and creates shady groves (*in umbrosis . . . lucis*: 11). In the poem's final eight lines, brightness again fades with the description of Death's pallor (13) and the night of the underworld (*nox*: 16). Thirdly, the poem displays successive images of heat and cold. Beginning with the explicit dichotomies of the first line (*acris × grata, hiems × veris*), contrasting pairs recur later in the poem (*igni × pruinis*: 3–4; *ardens × pallida*: 8, 13), to culminate in the final distich with the conquest of heat (*calet, tepebunt*). These series of shifts serve to underscore further the theme of change announced in the poem's opening line.⁴ The alternating patterns inherent to the natural world dominate the ode's imagery and contribute to the ambiguous reception of spring depicted elsewhere in the poem: labor must resume after winter's "joyful" leisure (*neque iam . . . gaudet*: 3); Faunus must be propitiated with the death of a young animal (11–12); and the Cyclopes manufacture the fearful thunderbolts that had threatened humanity in the preceding two odes of Horace's collection (7–8; cf. 1.2.2–4, 1.3.39–40).

These sets of contrasts are underscored by Horace's manipulation of syntax and verse enjambment. In the poem's opening twelve lines, each of the twelve finite verbs occurs in the present tense. The repetition of *iam* (3, 5) and *nunc* (9, 11) further situates the varied movements of spring in one immediate and unified "now." The sequence culminates in the arrival of *pallida Mors* (13), who shatters this emphatic "now" by prompting a gnomic warning to remember mortality: "the short span of life prevents us from initiating far-off plans" (*vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*). The epigrammatic utterance is the poem's last end-stopped sentence. From this point on, syntax and order become disrupted as Death destroys the careful grouping of couplets and four-line sense units in the preceding lines.⁵ As a means of emphasizing the powerlessness of human beings in the face of death, the verb used to describe Sestius' descent to the underworld—*mearis*—deprives its subject of active

⁴ M. O. Lee, *Word, Sound, and Image in the Odes of Horace* (Ann Arbor 1969) 66–67, also remarks on the "countercurrents" of imagery in this poem, which he believes combine with sonic patterns in order to draw attention to Faunus at the ode's center (70).

⁵ N. E. Collinge, *The Structure of Horace's Odes* (London 1961) 95–98, sees 1.4 as divided into two parts, the first expressing circular motion (lines 1–12) and the second linear. He does not, however, recognize the crucial role the closing relative clause plays in the poem's structure (as discussed below in the text).

agency. Before Horace the word occurs most often in Lucretius, where it normally describes the movement of inanimate aspects of nature such as sound, air, and light; in the rare instances in which the verb describes a person's movement, the motion is unstructured and indefinite.⁶ Hence its employment here situates Sestius as a toy of external forces.

Sestius' powerlessness is further highlighted by the grammar, as the dramatic time transfers from the present to the future. The main verbs after Death's arrival—*premet* (16), *sortiere* (18), and *mirabere* (19)—all describe the consequences of Sestius' mortality. Once dead, he can no longer be *magister bibendi* at the banquet; nor will he be able to admire his beloved Lycidas. The grammar of the lines mirrors their sense, and so effects the death of their subject: the future verb-forms exclude Sestius from the present and lively action of the first three quatrains and place him in the constricting realm of death. Replacing him in life is the grammatical subject of the poem's final present tense (*calet*), the passionate *iuventus*. This removal of the addressee from the ode's closing images receives further emphasis through the altered use of the temporal particles *iam* (16) and *nunc* (20), which point not to Sestius' immediate pleasures but to his imminent deprivation: *iam te premet nox* ("soon night will press upon you": 16); *quo [sc. Lycida] calet iuventus / nunc omnis* ("every young guy is hot for Lycidas now": 19–20). The enjambment of *nunc* in the latter example is especially emphatic and unexpected, since each previous occurrence of *iam* and *nunc* has occupied first position in its clause. The repeated temporal particles guarantee the recurrence of love and passion even after Sestius' death. This new cycle will involve new actors. A similar recasting of a poem's setting occurs in *Carmen* 1.9, the so-called Soracte ode. In this poem, the speaker's injunctions to the young addressee Thaliarchus conjure up the boy's future, thereby effectively removing the speaker himself from the poem's closing scenes (1.9.18–24). In both poems, the final images recall the imminent pleasures of a youth (Thaliarchus; Lycidas) that have already been enjoyed by a member of the preceding generation (the speaker of 1.9; Sestius), but they are pleasures which the speaker can now reexperience only through recollection.⁷ In each poem, the older generation is denied access to the final scenes in order to make way for the younger.

⁶ See *TLL* 8.785.53–72. The only pre-Horatian examples I have found of *meare* used of a person are Plaut. *Stich.* 442 (the meanderings of a negligent *servus*) and Lucr. 1.318, 4.371, 4.881 (all describing the indefinite movements of unspecified individuals).

⁷ I follow H. D. Cameron's interpretation of *repetantur* at 1.9.20 as meaning "let these things be recalled" ("Horace's Soracte Ode [*Carm.* 1.9]," *Arethusa* 22 [1989] 152–53).

If my analysis were to stop at this point, the sympotic resolution posited by Davis would seem validated. When one considers *Odes* 1.4 in conjunction with other poems of the *carpe diem* type, what Horace implies through his negative description of Sestius' afterlife becomes clear: enjoy the moment. The precarious position of Sestius had been suggested from his first mention. The adjective *beatus* (14), following as it does the somber reminder of death's impartiality to a mortal's wealth (*regum . . . turris*), becomes heavily ironic as Horace exploits both lexical possibilities of the word, "wealthy" and "happy." The poet proceeds to describe Sestius' new infernal home as poor (*exilis*), and further ironizes the status of this future abode through the oxymoronic juxtaposition of *Plutonia*, with its ambiguous meanings "belonging to Pluto (god of the underworld)" and "belonging to Plutus (god of wealth)."⁸ Like the kings of line 14, Sestius too will lose his realms of pleasure—wine (*regna vini*) and love (*tenerum Lycidan*). On a literary level, these two elements constitute important features of the generic banquet, and so recall the action of the third quatrain, where celebrants wreath their anointed heads in an unquestionably convivial context. Following the conventions of the genre, these reminders of mortality should prompt the addressee to enjoy drinking and boys while he is still alive.

Yet even if one were to grant that generic convention demands a *carpe diem* response to the situation outlined for 1.4, one must still confront what this particular poem is saying. I have noted above how the nonsubordinate tenses in the ode proceed from present to future, thereby denying Sestius access to the eternal joys of spring. This tense sequence resurfaces in miniature in the relative clause closing the poem, a clause that concentrates entirely on the future of young Lycidas and, in keeping with the cyclical imagery, is itself expressed in a circular, chiasmic order (verb-subject-adverb × adverb-subject-verb: *calet iuventus / nunc . . . mox virgines tepebunt*). New cycles of passion replace the outmoded love of Sestius. With Sestius now effectively confined to Hades by the grammar, other men emerge to take pleasure in Lycidas. The subordinated verb form in line 19—*calet*—rescues the reader from Hades by offering a new present, a present subsequent to the life of Sestius. The poem's final three words then describe the next stage in Lycidas' sexual maturity, as the male suitors become displaced by desirous young women: *mox virgines tepebunt*. Just as Sestius must now yield, so too will the

⁸ The two gods seem originally not to have been distinguished; see *RE* 21:1, 992.25–57 (Wüst), and 1041–42 (Zwicker). Cicero, at any rate, certainly recognizes the identification of wealth with the underworld god when he discusses Pluto's Roman equivalent, Dis (*qui [est] dives, ut apud Graecos Pluto: N.D. 2.26.66*).

For puns on the underworld that are as elliptical as Horace's, see Soph. *OT* 30 (Hades is "enriched"—*πλουτίζεται*—with lamentation), and Naevius' epitaph, where the poet is described as *Orco traditus thesauro* (Gell.1.24.2).

young men soon give way, when Lycidas reaches the time for marriage and fatherhood.⁹

In terms of cycles, *tepebunt*, the final word of the poem, is telling. Meaning “to grow warm,” the verb recalls the ode’s first word, *solvitur*, which describes winter yielding to the warmth of spring. The young new world of the final relative clause seems to provide relief from the unsettling intrusion of Death, in the same way spring provides relief from the harshness of winter. But this is a poem emphasizing change. Just as spring’s onset contains hints of foreboding, so too does the verb *tepere* prompt further reflection. As a denominative verb related to the words *tepor* and *tepidus*, *tepere* literally means “to be lukewarm.” Yet the precise translation of the future of this verb into English depends on whether the state described as *tepor* is reached from a lower temperature (“to grow warm”) or a higher (“to grow cool”).¹⁰ Two considerations demand that we understand both possible meanings of the verb simultaneously. First, the presence of *calet* would imply that *tepebunt* describes more than simply the same event in the future. In changing subjects, Horace has also chosen to change verbal notions. Second, the tension resulting from the choice of *tepebunt* suggests rising and waning passions, and thereby creates a further cycle in the poem. With one word, Horace captures both the initial sexual excitement of the *virgines* and their eventual, inevitable, waning of interest.¹¹ The parallel movement of the poem’s verbal tenses (from present to future) and the shifting ambiguity of *tepebunt*

⁹ M. Celentano discusses Lycidas’ “physiological” passage from homoerotic to heterosexual love in the context of Theocritus 13 (“Licida: la passione degli uomini, l’amore delle donne [Hor. *carm.* I 4, 19–20],” *Quaderni Urbinati di cultura classica* 47 [1984] 132–34). One may also compare Catullus 61.128–50, where the groom must abandon his *concupinus* upon marriage. See further A. Richlin, “Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993) 523–73, esp. 534–35.

¹⁰ Woodman (above, n.2) 775–77 notes this ambiguity in *tepere* and concludes that Horace wishes us to concentrate on the meaning “cool off” (following J. Bramble, he cites in support *Ov. Am.* 2.2.53–54 and *Rem.* 7). Horace, he argues, wished to end the poem by emphasizing “the pathetic sadness of life” (777). T. C. W. Stinton agrees with Woodman’s interpretation of the verb’s denotation, but believes Horace is exhibiting “quiet humor” (“Horatian Echoes,” *Phoenix* 31 [1977] 163). By insisting on both meanings, I revive Horace’s optimism and render a reading more congruent with the poem’s cyclical imagery.

For other instances of *tepere* and its cognates meaning “to cool off,” see Quint. *Inst.* 6.1.44, Petr. 94.5 *intepescente saevitia*; for the sexual sense of “waning passions,” see *Ov. Am.* 2.19.15 *tepidos . . . refoverat ignis*. *Liquesco* is another denominative verb that denotes a middle state, and can describe either transformation from a solid to a liquid (i.e., “to melt,” as in snow: *Liv.* 21.36.6; or “to become molten”: *Lucr.* 1.493, *Verg. Aen.* 8.446) as well as from gas to liquid (clouds “condensing” to rainwater: *Vitr.* 8.2.1, 8.2.2).

¹¹ For Horace’s ability to use one word to create a cycle, cf. *Carm.* 1.35.2–3—[*Fortuna praesens . . . imo tollere de gradu / mortale corpus*—where the single word *mortale* introduces the idea of death’s inevitability at the very point when Horace describes an individual’s fortune changing for the better.

(from present desire to future ambivalence) replicate the poem's central metaphor. The poet mirrors the earlier main tense sequence of present to future not only with the poem's final subordinate clause but even with its final word; in so doing, he represents the life of human beings as a constantly evolving succession. Love for Lycidas moves from the lover Sestius to his younger male contemporaries, then, in turn, to the *virgines*, who will subsequently lose interest.

The final stage of Lycidas' sexual maturity involves, fittingly, young women, as he approaches the age to marry and beget children. *Carmen* 4.7 (*diffugere nives*), whose pattern of thought is frequently compared to that of 1.4, also has its closing image in Hades.¹² The concluding lines of this later poem, however, rather than concentrate on continuing love, lament how piety and friendship become futile in the face of death: "for Diana doesn't free the chaste Hippolytus from hell's shadows, nor does Theseus have the strength to break the Lethaeian chains binding his dear Perithous" (*infernīs neque enim tenebris Diana pudicū / liberat Hippolytū, / nec Lethaea valet Theseus abrumpere caro / vincula Perithoo*: 4.7.25–28). Death in 1.4, on the contrary, abruptly terminates the poem's celebration of spring and shifts focus to future generations among the living. This ode's final image stresses not finality but the continuity of human existence. The allusion to sexual reproduction in the warming of the young girls recalls the appearance earlier in the poem of the gods Faunus and Venus. The sacrifice to Faunus of a young animal is intended, ironically, to ensure the continued propagation of the flocks; similarly, the sacrifice of a kid renews the glistening spring of *Carmen* 3.13 (*o fons Bandusiae*). Just as these sacrificial deaths effect renewal, so too can Lycidas' maturity continue only after the removal of Sestius. In another allusion to renewal, Venus emerges in the ode's fifth line as the Lucretian *genetrix*, a symbol of the new spring's fertility.¹³ From this single image of Venus initiating the rites of spring arises the associated ideas of birth and nurture, as subsequent lines depict the earth producing flowers and myrtle, Venus' sacred plant (10). Notions of recurrence and renewal are further suggested by the presence of the moon, a frequent Horatian symbol of change and a celestial body linked by the ancients

¹² Detailed comparisons of the two poems can be found in E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (London 1957) 419–21; D. Levin, "Concerning Two Odes of Horace, 1.4 and 4.7," *CJ* 54 (1958/9) 354–58; Rudd (above, n.2) 379–83; K. Quinn, *Latin Explorations* (London 1963) 14–28; C. Becker, *Das Spätwerk des Horaz* (Göttingen 1963) 146–60; Woodman (above, n.2).

¹³ Quinn (above, n.12) 18; Nisbet/Hubbard (above, n.2) 59. M. Erler discusses the Epicurean associations of 1.4 vis-à-vis *Lucr.* 5.737–747 ("Horaz über den Wandel der Jahreszeiten: Epikureische und stoische Motive in *carm.* 1.4 und 4.7," *RhM* 123 [1980] 333–36).

with fertility and rejuvenation.¹⁴ These two figures—Venus and the moon—have replaced, respectively, the Artemis and sun of Horace's Callimachean model for lines 5–7.¹⁵ It is now possible to understand why. Both Venus and the moon, symbols pregnant with significations, contribute to the poem's theme of rebirth.

The cyclical arrangements of theme, imagery, and syntax are framed in a meter unique to the *Odes*, but appropriate to 1.4. This meter, traditionally called the Third Archilochian, takes the following form in Horace:

$$\begin{array}{c} - \bar{u} \bar{u} / - \bar{u} \bar{u} / - \bar{u} \bar{u} / - \bar{u} \bar{u} : - \bar{u} / - \bar{u} / - x \\ \bar{u} - \bar{u} - / - : - \bar{u} - / \bar{u} - x \end{array}$$

The first half of each distich proceeds in a forward movement consisting of four dactyls followed by three trochees. The steadily increasing momentum of this verse—the shorts are never resolved after the third dactyl—becomes checked in the second line as the rhythm reverses itself to a predominantly iambic movement. This regular reversal parallels the poem's central metaphor. For within every two-line group, the meter turns back on itself, just as each season gives way to the next. This apparent conflict between rhythms, however, becomes resolved by the end of each distich. Since the second, iambic line is catalectic, it concludes after the main caesura with an ithyphallic ($- \bar{u} - \bar{u} - -$), a rhythm identical to that following the diaeresis of every first line. Hence one hears a continual alternation in the poem's rhythm between conflict (at the middle of each distich) and resolution (at the end). This alternation, I would claim, represents at a thematic level the relaxation of the psychological tension that the poem invokes by contrasting the cyclical illusion of seasonal progression with the linear reality of human mortality. This contrast, seemingly inherent in the ode's central metaphor, is especially called into question by the ode's closing rhythm. For in the poem's final four lines, where the poet speaks of the generations subsequent to Sestius' death, the regularity of the rhythm receives more emphasis than the tension, as the ithyphallic in the first line of the distich not only follows a word break, but initiates a change in syntax introduced by the repeated word *quo* (*quo simul mearis*: 18; *quo calet iuventus*: 20). In the meter, then, the creation of order out of conflict reflects the poet's

¹⁴ Moon as symbol of change: *Carm.* 2.11.10, 2.18.16, 4.7.13, *Ep.* 1.12.18; as a source of rejuvenation: Cic. *N.D.* 2.19.50 *multa . . . [ab luna] manant et fluunt quibus et animantes alantur augescantque et pubescant maturitatemque adsequantur quae oriuntur e terra* and the additional passages cited in A.S. Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis: de natura deorum* (Cambridge MA 1955) *ad loc.* Similarly, the moon is frequently linked with menstruation (Pease on *N.D.* 2.27.69) and Juno Lucina, the goddess of childbirth (Varr. *L.L.* 5.69; Pease on *N.D.* 2.27.68).

¹⁵ Call. *Dian.* 3.180–182. G. Pasquali notes the change without offering an explanation (*Orazio lirico* [Florence 1920] 717); cf. G. Herzog-Hauser, "Zum Problem der *imitatio* in der lateinischen Literatur," *WS* 64 (1949) 129.

own corrective regarding the validity of the poem's central antinomy. The meter of the ode, which at first seems to mimic the disjunction of the controlling metaphor, in fact ultimately presents a coherent and unifying rhythm. The precise responsion terminating each half of the distich encourages one to consider coherence in the poem at levels other than the metrical.

The formal components of *Carmen* 1.4 have conspired to offer a conception of time that is unusual for a *carpe diem* ode. A recent study of the portrayal of time in Roman culture has examined the popularity of two conflicting but coexistent models of how the Romans perceived their relationship to temporal progression.¹⁶ Both models seem to occur in Horace's lyrics. In the first, time plays an active role as it moves past the stationary individual. One frequently encounters this conception in Horace, especially in those poems in which the ephemeral nature of life receives special stress. The emphasis on time's agency underscores the helpless passivity of humans: *eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume, labuntur anni* (2.14.1–2; cf. 1.11.7–8; 3.29.48; *passim*). In the second temporal model, on the other hand, time is represented as an immobile object which the active individual goes forth to meet.¹⁷ This model occurs rarely in Horace's odes—a possible exception being one's inevitable movement to Hades and the underworld, a movement which could also be construed as spatial rather than temporal (*quo simul mearis*: 1.4.17; 4.7.14. The movement can also be figured as passive: *omnes eodem cogimur* [2.3.25]). Both paradigms—of time either in a fixed position or in motion—present an essentially pessimistic notion of temporal progression. Advancement, either *of* time or *in* time, becomes construed as linear and finite, a goal-oriented movement that can have only one result for the individual—death. *Odes* 1.4, however, offers a third model. For this poem situates time in relation not to a solitary figure but to the collectivity of individuals who constitute humanity. As a result, time and human existence proceed simultaneously, allowing no possibility for finitude or termination. The immortality of humanity, by this model, resides not in its components but in its collective succession of generations. In keeping with the other aspects of the poem as I have described them, perhaps one might best describe this progression of both humanity and time as a series of interconnected circles. Each circle would then represent, in the case of humanity, generational reproduction and, in the case of time, seasonal cycles. In *Odes* 1.4, the human generations are indeed, as Homer's Glaukos asserts, like those of the leaves—the leaves may scatter seasonally, but the living tree ensures perpetual renewal (*Il.* 6.146–148). From the potentially pessimistic contemplation of an individual's

¹⁶ M. Bettini, *Anthropology and Roman Culture* (Baltimore 1991) 126–33.

¹⁷ Bettini (above, n.16) 132 cites, among other texts, *Sen. Dial.* 10.3.2; *Ep.* 99.7.

ephemerality, Horace follows Glaukos in stepping back, to find solace in the continuity of generational succession.

The poem's alternative model of time, together with its counter-currents of joy and foreboding, of death and rebirth, may have particular relevance for the historical situation of Horace's "blessed Sestius." In the remainder of my discussion, I would like to speculate on the compositional circumstances of this ode. Although external evidence is meager, the unique use of cyclical metaphor in 1.4 suggests that a particular historical circumstance underlies Horace's treatment of seasonal change.

The addressee of the poem undoubtedly represents Lucius Sestius, suffect consul of 23 B.C.E., the year *Odes* 1–3 were published. Despite this commonly accepted identification, however, critics normally maintain that the poem *solvitur acris hiems* has no connection with contemporary politics.¹⁸ Yet the poem's placement after the odes addressed to Maecenas, Augustus, and Vergil suggests that this fourth poem, addressed to a prominent contemporary, should also be treated as more than a simple occasional piece. Indeed, by offering an optimistic conception of humanity's relation to time, the poem allows Horace to stage an alternative to Sestius' political destiny.

In 23 B.C.E., Augustus resigned from the consulship he had held continuously for the previous eight years and chose Lucius Sestius as his replacement for the six months remaining in the term. Ancient historians praise the liberality of Augustus' choice: Sestius had been a close adherent to the assassin Brutus, and continued to remain steadfastly loyal even after Brutus' death (Dio 53.32.4; App. *BC* 4.51). The move seemed a clearly calculated signal from Augustus of his willingness to incorporate former adversaries into the newly emerging political structure. In light of these historical events, scholars customarily date Horace's address to Sestius, embedded in an ode to spring, to this same year, 23 B.C.E.¹⁹ Accordingly, the seasonal change marked in the poem's opening lines has been interpreted as a metaphor for political change, one that signals a "general allusion to the milder political climate."²⁰ This suggestion quite likely contains a kernel of truth. Yet it does not consider how the poem itself plays out the implications of its central metaphor. For the springtime of 1.4, as I have noted above, is not entirely mild. Foreboding occupies the ode's first twelve verses, and the poem closes with the temporal displacement and figural death of Sestius. The spring of *Carmen* 1.4, and its metaphorical equivalent in Augustus' second settlement,

¹⁸ As implied, for example, by how Fraenkel (above, n.12) 420–21 assesses the differences between the endings of 1.4 and 4.7; cf. also Nisbet/Hubbard (above, n.2) 70: "the poem is in no way about Sestius."

¹⁹ Nisbet/Hubbard (above, n.2) xxxvi; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (London 1939) 335.

²⁰ M. Santirocco, *Unity and Design in Horace's Odes* (Chapel Hill 1986) 31.

does involve a celebration of renewal, but it is a celebration tempered by uncertainty.

The poem's apprehensive joy mirrors events that had affected Sestius and Rome. Sestius had the privilege of receiving the consulship from Augustus despite—or more likely because of—the fact that approximately twenty years earlier he had been among those proscribed after Philippi (App. *BC* 4.51). The same pro-Republican attitude that had almost cost him his life also, according to one source, allowed him to acquire the suffect consulship (Dio 53.32.4). Part of the inspiration of 1.4 may stem from Horace's reflections on this dramatic change in Sestius' situation. Memories of what could have been—and of what could be—would help explain the ambivalence with which the poet greets the onset of spring in this ode.²¹

Recent events not directly connected with Sestius may also have affected the ambiguity of 1.4's opening movements. The year 23 witnessed a conspiracy against Augustus' life, the details of which are preserved only in bare outline. An alleged participant in the affair was the co-consul with whom Augustus had begun the year, Licinius Murena, Maecenas' brother-in-law and a man known for his outspokenness (Dio 54.3.4). Murena was to be executed for his complicity in the plot. The significance of the conspiracy for an appreciation of Horace's poetry lies in the commonly accepted identification of Murena with the Licinius of *Carmen* 2.10—*rectius vives, Licini*.²² This ode to Licinius can be most plausibly dated to the first half of 23, between the time when Murena mysteriously left the consulship and when he was implicated in the conspiracy against Augustus. In 2.10, Murena provides a cogent example of what can happen if a consul does not respect proper limits—"lightning bolts strike the tops of mountains" (2.10.11–12: *feriunt . . . summos / fulgura montis*). Similarly, during Sestius' spring, the Nymphs and Graces dance vigorously, unconscious of the thunderbolts being manufactured underground (1.4.5–8).

Another recent event could also be informing the poet's mode of presentation. In the early part of 23, Augustus had become so ill that death seemed certain (Dio 53.30.1)—*pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede*. . . . The possible consequences of this illness—renewed strife at Rome—would not have been unconsidered by a poet who had witnessed civil wars for the majority of his adult life. So much of Rome's present status rested on this single man Augustus, as Horace himself makes clear two poems earlier in his collection. The possibility of Augustus'

²¹ Similar sentiments seem to inform Horace's ode to Pompeius (*Carm.* 2.7). In that poem, the conflict between joy at Pompeius' return from the civil wars and resignation at what that return might mean for Rome's political future is felt in the invitation to atypically wild drinking (2.7.26–28), an activity designed in this case to provoke forgetfulness (21: *oblivioso . . . Massico*).

²² For the identification of Licinius and further details of the conspiracy, which some argue occurred in 22 B.C.E., see R. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes II* (London 1978) 151–57.

death could easily have affected the version of mortality Horace presents in 1.4. Still other events from this poorly documented year may have informed Horace's cautious portrayal of spring.²³ Yet an attempt to pinpoint further the reasons for Horace's ambivalence would be misguided. In a year that saw Augustus' life threatened by both illness and conspiracy, that witnessed the removal of a consul with close familial ties to one of Augustus' chief advisers and the creation of another who had once belonged to the official opposition, it does not seem helpful to represent Horace's work as displaying a single discrete political ideology. For the axis along which Horace moves in 1.4 should be marked not by the extremes of "Republican" and "Augustan" but by those of "public" and "private." In light of recent events, Horace turns in the fourth poem of his first book from the political to the personal.

The closing images of *Carmen* 1.4 celebrate cyclical recurrence in the private life of love and propagation. The political life, by comparison, has a short, linear existence. The commonplace occupying the poem's fifteenth line—*vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam*—receives an added dimension when one considers Sestius' situation at the presumed date of composition. He should not plan to achieve too much in his suffect consulship; the six months allotted will hardly allow him even to lay the foundations for any substantial undertaking. The poem enjoins him instead to retreat from the political. The option offered is the world of Lycidas.

For Horace in his lyrics, the succeeding generation exercises a double modality. Most frequently, the poet's conception of it is negative. The members of the next generation are represented as nameless heirs, whose sole interest lies in acquiring their predecessors' wealth (e.g., 2.3.20; 2.14.25; 4.7.19). In 1.4, on the contrary, no such role is played by Lycidas, the figure in the poem occupying the structural position of *heres* by serving as a human link between the addressee's own life and the experiences from which Death shall exclude him. Lycidas, unlike these heirs, is distinguished by both a name and the sympathetic epithet *tener*. He displaces the generic and impersonal *heres* and, in so doing, erases the potential pessimism at the ode's end. Lycidas is indeed an heir, but only in the metaphorical sense: he will maintain Sestius' function in the society outside politics. In other odes, the *heres* serves to remind the addressee of the limits of life and, as a corollary, to encourage the enjoyment of one's possessions while still alive. Lycidas too plays an admonitory role, but the alternative he promotes is not the timely use of wealth, but a retreat from the political. For regardless of whether he is a fictional character or Sestius' own favorite freedman, Lycidas' Greek name and role as Sestius' beloved would certainly preclude him from any

²³ Cf. the remarks of Syme (above, n.19) 333: "Meagre and confused, the sources defy and all but preclude the attempt to reconstruct the true history of [the] year."

serious future involvement in Roman politics.²⁴ Although occupying the position of the generic heir, Lycidas cannot then be imagined as Sestius' political successor. He represents, rather, Sestius' successor in the cycle of love, in a private life existing separately from the political. In the genealogy of sexual attraction and reproduction, the poet suggests, rest the only certainties of human existence.

A reading of the ode as an assertion of the private over the public receives support from the poem's placement in the opening sequence of *Odes* Book 1. The two odes immediately preceding 1.4 contain allusions to contemporary works of poetry. In the ode to Augustus (1.2), echoes from Vergil's *Georgics* have been detected; in the ode to Vergil (1.3), echoes from the *Aeneid*.²⁵ With 1.4, the poet discards this epic tone for a pastoral setting suggestive of Vergil's *Eclogues*. Even the name of the lover, Lycidas, recalls a shepherd from the fourth and seventh poems of Vergil's collection.²⁶ On account of Lycidas' presence in the poem's closing quatrain, it has been suggested that Horace here shares with Sestius "their common lot and their interest in poetry."²⁷ However one may interpret the choice of the name, the introduction of Lycidas clearly facilitates the abandonment of the world of politics at the poem's close. This departure into a private life of love sets the tone for the next two poems of the book. 1.5, the ode to Pyrrha, embraces fully the artfulness and artificiality of love lyric while 1.6, the *recusatio* addressed to Agrippa, explicitly discharges the poet from the role of political encomiast, affirming instead his role as love poet (1.6.17–20). The ode to Sestius enacts within the space of one ode the greater shift that the poet makes from the politically charged hymn to Augustus (1.2) to the literary fiction of 1.5. For in 1.4, an address to the highest-ranking official in the year *Odes* 1–3 were published concludes by focusing on the future delights of a boy with no possible political future.

The closing movements turn Sestius' attention from unattainable political hopes to the continuity of love and regeneration. For in 1.4, death effects not simply the erasure of self, but one's replacement by others. Each generation must yield to the next. Horace elsewhere

²⁴ E. Will, analyzing brick stamps from the historical Sestius' workshops, finds possible evidence for Lycidas being the name of an actual freedman of Sestius ("Ambiguity in Horace, *Odes* 1.4," *CP* 77 [1982] 240–45). For the stigma attached in Roman politics to the position of the boy beloved, see Richlin (above, n.9) esp. 538–39.

²⁵ Santirocco (above, n.20) 25–30, who cites additional bibliography.

²⁶ Santirocco (above, n.20) 32.

²⁷ G. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (London 1968) 86; cf. 302: the "name Lycidas suggests poetry written by Sestius." Williams may be making this claim because he wishes to deny all reality to the figure of Lycidas; see his "Poetry in the Moral Climate of Augustan Rome," *JRS* 52 (1962) 39–43, esp. 41, and the counter-arguments of J. Griffin, "Augustan Poetry and the Life of Luxury," *JRS* 66 (1976) 96–104.

stresses the need for the older generation to recognize the inevitability of this renewal. In *Carmen* 4.13, the poet warns Lyce that failure to understand the cycles of nature will provoke mockery from the younger generation. The poem closes like 1.4, with a look to the future, but a future from which Lyce, unlike Sestius, has not had the good fortune of being excluded: “the fates [will] preserve Lyce for a long time, until she matches the years of an overaged crow, so that hot young men—enjoying much laughter—can visit her, a torch fallen into ashes” (*fata . . . / servatura diu parem / cornicis vetulae temporibus Lycen, / possent ut iuvenes visere fervidi / multo non sine risu / dilapsam in cineres facem*: 4.13.23–28). Yet Lyce could have avoided this fate. Elsewhere in Horace’s poetry, a proper recognition of generational succession injects a measure of optimism into the otherwise bleak recollection of mortality. The poet concludes *Epistle* 2.2 with a sentiment recalling the situation of Sestius:

vivere si recte nescis, decede peritis.
 lusisti satis, edisti satis atque bibisti:
 tempus abire tibi est, ne potum largius aequo
 rideat et pulset lasciva decentius aetas.

(*Ep.* 2.2.213–216)

If you don’t know how to live properly, yield to the experienced. You’ve played, eaten, and drunk enough: it’s time that you leave, before your overambitious drinking is scornfully rejected by a generation more suited to playfulness.

In this epistle, the recognition of time’s passage does not emphasize, as is normal for the *Odes*, the barrenness of death, but the joys accessible to the next generation. Humanity maintains a timeless existence, cut off from the ephemeral world of political maneuvering. Unlike the glories of a temporary consulship, the pleasures of the banquet do not vanish. They continue, but with a new set of symposiasts, a group of youths whom time alone has rendered more suitable (*decentius*).

* * *

Each separate element of *Odes* 1.4—meter, syntax, imagery, and thematic development—contributes to the poem’s implicit comparison between the cyclical renewal of the seasons and the linear progression of human mortality. Yet in a Horatian ode on the seasons one expects the eventual *disjuncture* of tenor and vehicle, a disjuncture arising from the recognition that our lives, unlike nature, do not experience perpetual rebirth. In the case of *Odes* 1.4, however, this antinomy of seasonal rejuvenation and human mortality does not emerge as an explicit statement. Instead, the antinomy collapses, as it succumbs to the systemic pressure of the poem’s formal elements. The ode’s obsessive preoccupation with cycles, especially in its representation of new life after Sestius’ death, causes tenor and vehicle to cohere, and thereby redefines the notion of human mortality. Sestius must

not place his hopes in contemporary politics, but is bidden to consider the constant rejuvenation of love. This redefinition of that which really endures constitutes the sobering and paradoxical observation addressed to the supposedly *beatus* Sestius: Sestius' death may end his own four seasons, but Lycidas, at the beginning of a new cycle, continues the forward progression. The mention of Lycidas initiates a fresh, new world of love, but a world mirroring that of the previous lines of the poem through reminiscences of vocabulary (*nunc*), imagery (warmth), and syntax (tense sequence). These echoes prompt the reader to reconsider the ode's central metaphor: our individual lives are *not* akin to the seasons, the poem asserts, but the combined life of humanity is, as it renews itself in the progression from the discoveries of youth to the memories of old age. In contrast to this perpetual progression, the finite and linear political career of Sestius fades into the background. For it is Lycidas and the *virgines* who will experience afresh the memories of Sestius. Sestius' past becomes the future of the *iuventus*. As the antinomy of nature and humanity collapses, the central metaphor—continual life, perpetual rebirth—coheres.

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