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HORACE, *ODES* 3.7: AN EROTIC *ODYSSEY*?*

Horace's Asterie ode (3.7) has been somewhat neglected by critics. Fraenkel, uninterested in the erotic odes, fails to mention it, and others see it as merely counterbalancing the preceding six Roman Odes by its frivolity and light irony.[1] However, it is one of Horace's most subtle and best-organized erotic odes, matching the more obvious conventions of Latin love-elegy with a romanticized *Odyssey* as an underlying framework.

The two opening stanzas set the scene (1–8):

> quid fles, Asterie, quem tibi candidi
> primo restituent vere Favonii
> Thyna merce beatum,
> constantis iuvenem fide
>
> Gygen? ille Notis actus ad Oricum
> post insana Caprae sidera frigidas
> noctes non sine multis
> insomnis lacrimis agit.

The situation, like so much in the poem, belongs to love-elegy: the poet speaks words of comfort to a girl in her lover's absence overseas (cf. Propertius 3.12, 4.3). Such an absence is usually on military service, but here Gyges is trading in the East, an element paralleled in Propertius 3.20.[2] The postponing of his name to the end of its sentence after a detailed description stresses the name and echoes a traditional technique of introducing new characters in poetry; this emphasis is increased by its isolated enjambement into the next stanza.[3] This is unsurprising, for Gyges' name is here significantly chosen: the merchant making money in Anatolian Bithynia ('Thyna merce beatum') has the name of the fabulously rich king of Lydia, also in Asia Minor.[4] Asterie herself also has a significant name: it means 'starry' (ἀστήρ), and suggests the traditional comparison with stars for beauty – she is clearly a good-

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[1] Frivolity and light irony: A. Y. Campbell, *Horace* (London, 1924), p. 225, H. Steele Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (New Haven and London, 1962), pp. 16, 111, 142. G. Pasquali, *Orazio Lirico* (Florence, 1920), pp. 463–70 provides an interesting treatment, comparing Propertius 3.12 but seeing no Odyssean aspect to Horace's poem. No mention of Odysseus either in the useful accounts of H. P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz* (Darmstadt, 1973), 2.98–102 and F.–H. Mutschler, *SO* 53 (1978), 111–32. For other articles on the poem to 1977, see Mutschler 126 n. 4 and W. Kissel in *ANRW* 31.3 (1981), 1505; add A. Bradshaw, *Hermes* 106 (1978), 158–61. The standard commentaries of Kiessling/Heinze and Gordon Williams are cited below by author's name only.

[2] In that poem, however, the poet attempts to seduce a 'puella' left in Rome by her lover on a trading trip to Africa.

[3] So the name of Pompeius is postponed after a descriptive clause to the head of the second stanza in *Odes* 2.7; for the technique of name-postponement cf. T. E. V. Pearce, *CQ* 18 (1968), 338–40.

[4] Cf. Mutschler, art. cit. (n. 1), 113 n. 9; this allusion to *Γύγης ὁ πολύχρυσος* (Archilochus, fr. 19.1 West – cf. Herodotus 1.14) appeared in the second edition of Kiessling's Horace commentary (1890), but was later cut out by Heinze (it does not appear in the final Kiessling/Heinze of 1930).

looker.[5] This verbal play introduces a series of antitheses which provide the main constructive principle in these first two stanzas: Asterie's starry beauty safe in Rome is implicitly contrasted with the baneful stars of the She-Goat which bring storms to her lover far away ('insana Caprae sidera'),[6] just as the gentle spring breezes which will bring Gyges back are set against the violent winter winds which now detain him ('quem... candidi... restituent... Favonii' / 'ille Notis actus'),[7] and as her weeping at home is balanced by the weeping of Gyges abroad ('fles' / 'lacrimis').[8] The point of the first of these antitheses is that Gyges must temporarily endure evil stars rather than the company of the 'starry' girl he loves so well (apt statement of the situation of separation); of the second that evil winds will eventually turn to good (consolation and comfort); and of the third that the suffering and fidelity of the two separated lovers is equal in quality (compliment to their love).

Just as Asterie is in the situation of the elegiac 'puella' abandoned for foreign travel, so Gyges' characterization exploits elements of the elegiac lover. Like him, he is sturdily faithful ('constantis iuvenem fide': one would like to think that the archaic genitive 'fide' suggests old-fashioned fidelity);[9] like him, he spends cold, sleepless and tearful nights when apart from his beloved.[10] Asterie too is faithful, as her tears indicate. This pattern of two faithful lovers separated by a sea-voyage already suggests a parallel with the *Odyssey*, a parallel crucial to the poem as a whole and which will soon become more specific. Gyges is like Odysseus, loyally trying to sail home to his faithful beloved from the East but being caught up by storms: Asterie is a Penelope, weeping and waiting for news at home, perhaps thinking that her lover is dead. The poet performs for her the role of divine consoler parallel to that taken for Penelope by Athene, and in telling the lamenting Asterie that all is well with Gyges goes one better than his Odyssean model; Homer's Athene comforts Penelope in the matter of Telemachus' safety but will not tell her whether Odysseus, for whom she still weeps, is alive (*Odyssey* 4.795ff.). These resemblances, suggested in outline in the two stanzas which introduce the poem, are particularly strengthened by the two major facts which emerge in the two subsequent sections: Gyges, like Odysseus, is afflicted by amorous hospitality abroad (lines 9–20, stanzas 3–5), while Asterie, like Penelope, is plagued by a suitor at home (lines 21–32, stanzas 6–8).

The *Odyssey* exercised something of a fascination for erotic poetry, for its plot of a hero's return to his long-faithful wife after overcoming many troubles including the importunate advances of goddesses had numerous and evident romantic possibilities. The most frequent of these is the citation of Penelope as an *exemplum pudicitiae*, usually as a paradigm for or accusing contrast with the flighty 'puella',[11] but we also

[5] Noted by Kiessling/Heinze; for this τόπος cf. Denys Page, *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 161. Asterie's name is also mythological, being that of a sister of Leto and thence an earlier name of the island of Delos (where she was said to have leapt into the sea to escape the embraces of Zeus) – cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 409 with West's note, Callimachus, *H.* 4.37 with Mineur's note.

[6] The 'Capra' or she-goat may also symbolize the problems of passion which retain Gyges, for this animal is associated with Venus – cf. O. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt* (Leipzig, 1913), i.306.

[7] The change from winter storm-winds to soft spring breezes is naturally enough a τόπος of the spring poem – cf. Catullus 46.1–3, Meleager, *AP* 9.363.1, 10, Agathias, *AP* 10.14.

[8] A point noted by Syndikus, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 99 n. 8.

[9] Analogous is the only other archaic form of 'fides' in Horace, dative 'fide' at *Sat.* 1.3.95 'commissa fide', where Horace modifies the legal technical term 'fidei commissa' for dactylic verse but retains an archaic and legalistic flavour by using the old form.

[10] Cf. conveniently Syndikus, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 99 n. 9.

[11] Penelope, *exemplum pudicitiae*: Propertius 2.8.17, 2.14.27, 2.24.35, 2.34.93, 3.3.17, 3.10.15, 3.12 *passim*, 3.13.10, 24, 4.1.71, 4.7.49; Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.47, 2.18.21, 29, 3.4.23, *Ars* 1.478, 2.103, 139, *Rem.* 66.

have two extended treatments comparing the *Odyssey* with the elegiac world: Propertius 3.12, which explicitly represents the lovers Postumus and Galla as Odysseus and Penelope, and Ovid, *Heroides* 1, the amatory epistle of Penelope to her tarrying Odysseus which characterizes her as an elegiac 'puella'.[12] Horace himself not only uses the standard paradigm of Penelopean fidelity[13] but also seems to regard eroticized treatments of the *Odyssey* as commonplace, for at *Odes* 1.17.17ff. he suggests such a song as the subject for the music-girl Tyndaris, whom he is inviting to a symposium in the country:

> hic in reducta valle Caniculae
> vitabis aestus et fide Teia
> dices laborantis in uno
> Penelopen vitreamque Circen.

This passage may give a further hint on the origin of this view of the *Odyssey*. 'Fide Teia' has generally been taken as referring generally to the kind of light love-poetry for which Anacreon of Teos was famed,[14] but there is no reason why Horace should not be referring to a specific subject of Anacreon in a poem now lost, just as a similar reference elsewhere in the *Odes* to 'Aeoliis fidibus' and 'aureo plectro' lists subjects known to have been treated by Sappho and Alcaeus (2.13.24–8):

> Aeoliis fidibus querentem
>
> Sappho puellis de popularibus,
> et te sonantem plenius aureo,
> Alcaee, plectro dura navis,
> dura fugae mala, dura belli.

Such a re-working of a Homeric theme for one's own purposes would be well paralleled in archaic erotic lyric.[15]

With this romantic view of the *Odyssey* in mind let us return to Horace's poem. Having presented a positive picture so far in the opening two stanzas (Gyges' return is seen as certain, and so is his fidelity), the poet proceeds in the final two sections of the poem, each in three stanzas, to identify possible obstructions to the repetition of the happy ending of the *Odyssey* for Asterie and Gyges, in other words how far they will be able to live up to their respective models under similar pressure. First of all we hear how Gyges, forced to winter in lodgings on the Adriatic coast, is under siege from his landlady (9–20):

> atqui sollicitae nuntius hospitae,
> suspirare Chloen et miseram tuis
> dicens ignibus uri,
> temptat mille vafer modis.
>
> ut Proetum mulier perfida credulum
> falsis impulerit criminibus nimis
> casto Bellerophontae
> maturare necem refert:
>
> narrat paene datum Pelea Tartaro,
> Magnessam Hippolyten dum fugit abstinens;
> et peccare docentis
> fallax historias monet.

[12] Cf. esp. H. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 263ff.

[13] *Odes* 3.10.11, *Sat.* 2.5.76ff.

[14] So Kiessling/Heinze and Nisbet/Hubbard *ad loc.*

[15] So Anacreon himself re-works the lament of Helen in *Iliad* 6.345ff. at *PMG* 347.11ff. (cf. R. Führer, *Formproblem – Untersuchungen zu den Reden in der frühgriechischer Lyrik* [Zetemata, 44] (Munich, 1967), pp. 130–2, M. L. B. Emley, *CR* 21 [1971], 169); Alcman uses Circe at *PMG* 80, and Alcaeus' concern with Helen is well-known (frr. 42 and 283 L/P).

'Atqui' strikes a note of dramatic contrast, bringing Asterie the bad news.[16] The 'hospita' Chloe is to Gyges as Circe and Calypso were to Odysseus: she has fallen in love with the guest forced upon her by bad luck as he tries to return home to his wife. Thus she and Asterie are in love with the same man ('tuis ignibus uri'), precisely the same view of the 'love-triangle' of Circe, Penelope and Odysseus given by Horace at *Odes* 1.17.19–20 and cited above:

> laborantis in uno
> Penelopen vitreamque Circen.

Gyges' reaction in this situation is that of Odysseus on the island of Calypso: he weeps in his longing to return home (cf. 7–8 with *Odyssey* 5.82–4, 156–8). The whole affair is characterized in traditional amatory terms: 'ignibus' and 'sollicitae' belong to the language of love-elegy, the latter referring appropriately to unrequited love,[17] and the 'nuntius' sent by Chloe inevitably recalls the 'lena' who traditionally tries to corrupt the elegiac 'puella', turning her by cunning rhetorical persuasion from the poor poet to a richer lover (Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.23ff., Tibullus 1.5.47ff., Propertius 4.5) for whom she acts as go-between. Horace neatly reverses the traditional sex-roles: the 'lena' becomes a male 'nuntius' sent by a woman to a man, a logical piece of wit, and it is the man and not the woman who makes professions of chastity. The clever eloquence of the 'nuntius' ('vafer') also matches that of the 'lena' (cf. Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.12 'nec tamen eloquio lingua nocente caret'), and the mythological stories of Bellerophon and Peleus recall the use of paradigmatic myth by the 'lena' in her usual persuasive speech (Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.47–8, Propertius 4.5.41–2).

These two myths are of course to be applied closely to Gyges' own situation. Both are stories of the 'Potiphar's wife' type where 'a woman, in love with a house-guest but rejected by him, made false accusations to her husband in the hope that he would kill the guest', and the reader is thus clearly expected to deduce that Chloe is a married woman.[18] Chloe's name also seems significantly chosen, suggesting by its allusion to fresh green vegetation (χλοή) that Asterie's rival (though married) is young and can compete with her charms, thus stressing the dangerous assault on Gyges' fidelity.[19] In summarizing the words of the 'nuntius' (13–20) the poet suggests the go-between's insistent rhetoric, repeating the verbs of telling ('refert', 'narrat', 'monet') and the central message of the dangers of over-chastity ('nimis casto', 'abstinens'); 'necem' and 'datum...Tartaro' give the threatened end, 'falsis ...criminibus' the threatened means. However, even in the midst of these menaces the poet gives comfort by implication to Asterie, for the myths seem chosen for her solace rather than in order to carry the cause of Chloe: neither Bellerophon nor Peleus yielded to such pressure, and both escaped from their predicament[20] – the suggestion is that the same will hold for Gyges. He also finds room for a witty word-play in 'Magnessam Hippolyten dum fugit abstinens': Hippolyte is difficult to escape

[16] So 'atqui' articulates a similar contrast at *Odes* 3.5.49.

[17] Cf. R. Pichon, *De Sermone Amatorio Apud Latinos Elegiarum Scriptores* (Paris, 1902), pp. 166 and 265.

[18] So Gordon Williams *ad loc.*; the quotation is also from his commentary.

[19] Mutschler, art. cit. (n. 1), 115 n. 5 connects Chloe with the similar cult-title of Demeter, but this seems a long shot. On another Horatian Chloe in vegetative surroundings cf. *Odes* 1.23.1 with Nisbet/Hubbard's note.

[20] For the Bellerophon story cf. *Iliad* 6.144ff. (it was also told in lost plays – Sophocles' *Iobates* and Euripides' *Stheneboia* and *Bellerophon*); for the Peleus story cf. Pindar, *Nem.* 4.57ff., 5.25ff.

because she is Magnesian and therefore 'magnetically' attractive.[21] The final description of the 'nuntius' could easily describe an elegiac 'lena':

> peccare docentis
> fallax historias monet.

'Peccare' is a standard term for infidelity to a lover in the elegists, while 'fallax' suits the machinations of the 'lena'.[22] For 'monet' Shackleton Bailey in his recent Teubner text has printed 'movet', 'stirs up', with adequate MS. authority and the blessing of Bentley.[23] However, this verb inappropriately stresses the raking up of old stories when the point is that these are vivid parallels, and the analogy between the 'nuntius' and the 'lena' suggests that 'monet' is right in the sense of 'tell as advice'. Each 'advises' in a sinister way what would be in the other more vulnerable party's 'best interests'; so 'monere' is used of this function of the 'lena' at Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.21–2 'illa monebat / talia'.

The third and final section of the poem refutes the doubts raised in the second about the fidelity of Gyges, but expresses counter-doubts about that of Asterie herself (21–32):

> frustra: nam scopulis surdior Icari
> voces audit adhuc integer, at tibi
> ne vicinus Enipeus
> plus iusto placeat cave;
>
> quamvis non alius flectere equum sciens
> aeque conspicitur gramine Martio,
> nec quisquam citus aeque
> Tusco denatat alveo.
>
> prima nocte domum claude neque in vias
> sub cantu querulae despice tibiae,
> et te saepe vocanti
> duram difficilis mane.

The single word 'frustra', emphatically placed at the beginning of section and stanza and followed by an explanatory 'nam',[24] answers at once the doubts introduced at the beginning of the previous section by the single word 'atqui': Gyges is unshakeable, 'deafer than the cliffs of Icarus', at least under the pressure so far applied ('adhuc'). The comparison with a rock for inflexibility is familiar,[25] but why the island of Icarus? It cannot be connected with Gyges' supposed location, for he is at Oricus in Illyria on the Greek side of the Adriatic, and the island of Icarus or Icaria is in the south-eastern part of the Aegean (the Icarian Sea). Kiessling/Heinze suggest that the name is chosen to individualize the rock and specify an area where rocks frequently stand up to vicious storms comparable with the onslaught of Chloe and her 'nuntius';[26] this

[21] For magnets from Magnesia cf. Lucretius 6.908–9 'quem magneta vocant patrio de nomine Grai, / Magnetum quia fit patriis in finibus ortus', Plato, *Ion* 533b, Pliny, *HN* 36.128, Pease on Cicero, *Div.* 1.86. This connection is Professor Nisbet's, and will be published in a forthcoming article of his. A speaker at Achilles Tatius 1.17.2 quotes the 'attraction' of the magnet as an example of the power of love, perhaps indicating that 'magnetic love' was a literary τόπος.

[22] For 'peccare' cf. Pichon, op. cit. (n. 17), p. 227.

[23] Bentley (*ad loc.*) regards both readings as possible ('utrumque recte') but prefers the second: 'illud tamen magis placet ut figuratus et ποιητικώτερον'.

[24] The sequence 'frustra, nam' is taken from Catullus 21.7, as Kiessling/Heinze note: for the emphatic enjambement in the *Odes* of a single word at the end of its clause and the beginning of a stanza cf. 1.2.49 and 3.1.37.

[25] Cf. Euripides, *Medea* 28 (cited by Kiessling/Heinze) with Page's note, Vergil, *Aen.* 7.586ff.

[26] On storms in the Icarian Sea cf. *Odes* 1.1.15 with Nisbet/Hubbard *ad loc.*

may be true, but in the context of the romanticized *Odyssey* one cannot resist hearing in 'Icari' an echo of Penelope's father Icar(i)us (hence her patronymic designation 'Icariotis', used in the elegists)[27] – Gyges, the Odysseus figure, here for a moment shows the fidelity associated with Penelope.[28] There may also be a further Odyssean hint in 'voces audit adhuc integer': the resistance to seductive voices suggests Odysseus' passage of the Sirens, seen in popular morality (if not in the *Odyssey* itself)[29] as a sign of virtue as Horace's moralizing account of the *Odyssey* at *Ep.* 1.2.17ff. makes clear:[30]

> rursus quid virtus et quid sapientia possit,
> utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen,
> qui domitor Troiae multorum providus urbis
> et mores hominum inspexit latumque per aequor,
> dum sibi, dum sociis reditum parat, aspera multa
> pertulit, adversis rerum immersabilis undis.
> Sirenum voces et Circae pocula nosti;
> quae si cum sociis stultus cupidusque bibisset,
> sub domina meretrice fuisset turpis et excors,
> vixisset canis immundus vel amica luto sus.

'Integer' suggests both this general virtue and the specific excellence of fidelity which is particularly relevant in the context.[31]

In 'at tibi' (22) Horace returns to Asterie, who though her Odysseus is battling through against seduction abroad, is herself in danger of dropping the high standards of Penelope in yielding to an importunate suitor at home. This turn of events is ironic, for Asterie was initially characterized as the traditional weeping and abandoned beloved, and the news that there is an alternative attraction at home comes as a surprise. The suitor is a persuasive neighbour of glamorous physique; the reader recalls the Antinous of the *Odyssey*, a local man and chief in strength and speech amongst the suitors.[32] The suitor is named Enipeus, again like Asterie and Gyges a significant name: it is that of a famous river of Thessaly, which neatly matches one of the youth's athletic attributes – that of swimming in the river Tiber (27–8),[33] just as another swimmer Hebrus is named after a river of Thrace (*Odes* 3.12.6–7). His methods are those of the elegiac lover (the serenade with the *tibia* from the street[34] and the παρακλαυσίθυρον) and Horace gives Asterie the advice one might expect to be

[27] Propertius 3.13.10; Ovid, *Pont.* 3.1.113; cf. *Culex* 265.

[28] Mr Hollis suggests that the choice of name may owe something to Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 23.2–3 Pf. ὡς ἀλὸς ἦχον ἀκούει | Σελλὸς ἐνὶ Τμαρίοις οὔρεσιν Ἰκαρίης, a similar *exemplum* of paying no heed (in that case, to curses).

[29] In the *Odyssey* (by contrast) Odysseus is of course tied up previously by his own orders, but tries to escape under the spell of the Sirens (12.192ff.)

[30] On the (generally Stoic) moralizing interpretation of Odysseus' resistance to the Sirens and of his other adventures cf. W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 121–7, F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris, 1956), pp. 369ff., H. Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* [tr. B. Battershaw] (London, 1963), pp. 328ff.

[31] Odysseus was at least technically unfaithful to Penelope with Circe and Calypso in the *Odyssey* – a suggestion perhaps as in the matter of freely resisting the Sirens (cf. n. 29 above) that Gyges follows the moralized rather than the strictly Homeric Odysseus.

[32] Antinous (along with Eurymachus) is said to be the 'best man' amongst the suitors (*Odyssey* 21.185–6), and his father Eupeithes is clearly an Ithacan (24.420ff.). Propertius (4.5.8) seems to regard him as the most likely/attractive of the suitors.

[33] Enipeus' name may also appropriately recall the use of that river as a disguise by Zeus in his seduction of the heroine Tyro, an episode mentioned in the *Odyssey* (11.235ff.; cf. Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.9.8). On swimming in the Tiber as an athletic exercise in Rome cf. Nisbet/Hubbard on *Odes* 1.8.8 and J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London, 1986), p. 89.

[34] The *tibia*: Propertius 2.7.11; Ovid, *Am.* 3.13.11.

offered by elegiac poets to the 'puella' under siege from a rival: lock up your house and remain faithful. The language of the παρακλαυσίθυρον is echoed by the poet in 'querulae', 'despice' and especially 'dura', suggesting the style and expressions of the suitor to balance those of the 'nuntius' at 13–20.[35] As a parting shot Asterie is urged once again to be a Penelope: 'difficilis mane' suggests the essential qualities of the faithful wife of Odysseus, called by Horace himself in this same book of the *Odes* 'Penelopen difficilem procis' (3.10.11).[36]

The art of this ode is evident in its careful movement and arrangement. The situation of Asterie in Rome is carefully set against that of Gyges on the Adriatic coast, and the argument is skilfully orchestrated in the three sections of the poem: the scene is set (stanzas 1–2, lines 1–8), Gyges' temptations described (stanzas 3–5, lines 9–20), his virtue proclaimed and the hope finally expressed that Asterie, though herself under temptation, will match him in the true devotion that her tears which opened the poem suggested (stanzas 6–8, lines 21–32). The parallel with the plot of the *Odyssey* is not mere literary decoration but adds an extra dimension to the argument as a whole: Gyges at the beginning of the poem is a faithful Odysseus, and at the end Asterie is asked to match him by remaining a Penelope. It is the integration of this epic myth, albeit in a romanticized version, with the traditional τόποι of love-elegy which makes *Odes* 3.7 not a mere frivolity but a subtle and interesting poem.

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[35] 'Querulus' recalls the traditional 'queri', 'querela' and 'questus' of the lover's complaint (Pichon, op. cit. [n. 17], p. 248), while 'despicere' and 'dura' commonly describe the heartlessness of the 'puella' – cf. Pichon, pp. 128, 136 and Commager, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 293 n. 46.

[36] For 'difficilis' in the amatory sense of 'unresponsive' cf. Syndikus, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 111 n. 17, Pichon, op. cit. (n. 17), p. 130.