

technique is similar to that used by Callimachus in his *Aetia* prologue. However, Catullus' principal weapon is the use of irony; Catullus expects a dismissive reaction to his work, and accordingly praises Nepos' own writings. The end of the poem enacts Catullus' claim to literary fame; the *novum libellum* becomes *perenne*. The process of revaluation applies to Nepos' work as well, inviting us to probe more deeply the seemingly innocuous praise offered by Catullus. Nepos may have included *omne aevum* in his *Chronica*, but there is no hint that the work will survive anything like so long.<sup>20</sup>

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#### HORACE'S VOLADICTORY: *CARM.* 2.20

'It is not likely that anything absolutely new can be added to the interpretation of this familiar poem.' So G. L. Hendrickson forty five years ago.<sup>1</sup> It need scarcely be noted that in spite of these cautionary words much has been written on this ode in the intervening years. With hesitation I add here a few words on what seems to me an overlooked yet central aspect of this poem.

The commentators have long noticed that it was commonplace among the Greeks and Romans to compare poets with birds. But none seems to observe that while such an observation provides illumination, it also prompts a serious question. *Carm.* 2.20 is an epilogue poem that proclaims Horace's greatness as a poet. Horace has, after all, been writing poetry for many years. What then does it mean that he is now about to be 'transformed' into a swan. Surely he has, so to speak, been a swan for several decades now.

A key to this question and indeed to the poem as a whole lies in a theme that has been overlooked. It is the notion in the ancient world that the soul was a bird. Whether Homer held this view is not clear, though verses like *ψυχὴ δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων παμένη Ἀιδόσδε βεβήκει* (*Il.* 16.856) and *ψυχὴ δ'...ἀποπταμένη πεπότηται* (*Od.* 11.222) may point in this direction. Similar is Plato's elaborate account of the soul in the *Phaedrus* which includes the words *ἐπτερωμένη μετεωροπορεῖ* (246B).<sup>2</sup> Birdlike souls are not rare in Greek art.<sup>3</sup> The soul of Aristeas, Pliny the Elder reports, took the form of a raven when it left him (*H.N.* 7.174), while that of Alexander the great apparently departed in the guise of an eagle (*Ps-Callisth.* 3.33). Cicero has Socrates tell Crito that he will *avolaturus* (*TD* 1.103-4; interestingly, Plato's Socrates only says *οἰχίσσομαι ἀπιών*: *Phaedo* 115D).

Thus, Horace's transformation into a swan is not so much a metamorphosis as a release of the bird-soul from its confining human container. The metamorphosis, such as it is, represents the freed soul's gaining (or regaining) its true form. That the bird is a swan is, of course, a reflection of Horace's essential being as a poet. He may have remembered that in Plato's Myth of Er Orpheus' soul chose the life of a swan (*Rep.* 620A). Thus, the bird-theme operates on two levels. Bird equals soul and therefore the

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Dr S. J. Heyworth and the anonymous referee for *CQ* for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> *CP* 44 (1949), 30.

<sup>2</sup> For the influence of Platonic imagery in *Carm.* III. 5, see S. J. Harrison, *CQ* 80 (1986), 502-7.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. the red-figure vase (Brit. Mus. E477) depicting the death of Prokris, in which the bird-soul is seen flying away from the dying human (G. Weicker, *Der Seelenvogel in der alten Literatur und Kunst* [Leipzig, 1902], 166-7. Further examples with illustrations and discussion at A. Fairbanks, *Athenian Lekythoi* (New York, 1907), 191-2.

epiphany of the bird represents the death of the body and the liberation of the soul. But 'bird equals poet' then becomes a metaphor for *non omnis moriar*: the part of Horace that will escape death is his poet-part (the swan), i.e. his poetry will be immortal. Further, when Horace proceeds to foretell his future universal fame in verses 13–20, he does so by cleverly adapting an element of the bird-soul motif, namely that the bird-soul traverses and surveys the world: πάντα δὲ οὐρανὸν περιπολεῖ... μετεωροπορεῖ τε καὶ πάντα τὸν κόσμον διοικεῖ (Plato, *Phaedrus* 246B); πάντα ὑποπτα θεωμένη, γῆν καὶ θάλατταν... καὶ ἔθνη ἀνδρῶν (Max. Tyr. 10.2);<sup>4</sup> περιπολῆσαι τὴν γῆν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν βάρβαρον καὶ νήσους πάσας κτλ. (Max. Tyr. 38.3). For Horace the travels of the soul become an emblem of the dissemination and repute of his oeuvre.

The difficult phrase *inani funere* (21) now receives further illumination. 'An empty funeral, a cenotaph, since there will be no corpse,' writes a recent critic.<sup>5</sup> But this carries literalness too far, assuming that Horace's body has actually flown away (if such were to be imagined, one would assume that Horace's friends would rejoice, not mourn). As Nisbet-Hubbard wrote, 'it is not the body that is missing but something more essential' (p. 347). Now we see what that 'something more essential' is. The bird that has flown away is Horace's soul; left behind is his body without its soul. Horace is probably thinking in terms of σώμα / σῆμα. The empty tomb is the body abandoned by the soul. One recalls *A.P.* 7.62.3–4, where an eagle that stands over Plato's tomb observes, ψυχῆς εἰμι Πλάτωνος ἀποπταμένης ἐς Ὀλυμπον/ εἰκῶν and concludes by noting that the body has been left behind in the earth.<sup>6</sup>

How are we to accept Horace's use or abuse of the theme and in particular his detailed portrait of the transformation in progress? Some have considered it bizarre or gross and condemned the poet, others have defended him by arguing that such descriptions of metamorphosis were commonplace enough not to shock Horace's audience. I am inclined to think that Horace's turning the delicate soul-bird theme into a rather coarse metamorphosis in the first person is part of a panoply of twists that mark this poem, twists that repeatedly counter the reader's expectations. The Ode, that by its position crowns the first two books of the Odes, undercuts some central expectations that Horace has been building in his audience. Thus, after numerous poems that stressed the inevitability of death and the need to accept that reality (e.g. 1.4.13–20, 2.3, 2.6), we suddenly learn that Horace himself will *not* die.<sup>7</sup> The final stanza then plays off two common but contradictory themes, the Epicurean theme that survivors should not mourn the dead man because death is not an evil, and the Ennian theme that survivors should not mourn because the dead poet lives on. Further, the comrade who implied that he and Maecenas could not be long separated by death (2.17.1–22) will, after all, abandon his friend. The poet who had indicated that he was not a swan (implicit at 1.6.1–2), turns out to be one. The artist whose creative equipment was only *tenuis* (1.6.9) will in fact not be *tenuis* (2.20.1–2),<sup>8</sup> and the poet whose work was intended for just the select few (1.1.30–32) will be read by inhabitants of the entire globe. The transformation of the bird-soul theme into a graphic metamorphosis is then yet another shock for Horace's audience.

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<sup>4</sup> The latter passage noted by Nisbet-Hubbard (Oxford, 1978), p. 333.

<sup>5</sup> L. Bonfante, *PP* (1992), 39 n. 26.

<sup>6</sup> The poem is cited by H. P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz* (Darmstadt, 1972), vol. 1, 482 n. 16.

<sup>7</sup> See D. Porter, *Horace's Poetic Journey* (Princeton, 1987), 145.

<sup>8</sup> Porter, *ibid.*