

## Elegiac Performance and Elegiac Spectatorship in *Odes* 1.5

While several scholars (notably Davis 1991, Lowrie 1997, Johnson 2012) have devoted attention to the role that elegiac discourse plays in Horace's *Odes*, no one, to my knowledge, has read *Odes* 1.5 as a ludic engagement with elegy. I argue that the language and dramatic situation of this poem evoke the elegiac genre and, more specifically, that the speaker moves from elegiac performance to elegiac spectatorship as the poem progresses. This dynamic verges on a game of hide-and-seek: the poet draws us into seeing him as an elegiac performer at the beginning of the poem only to "reveal," partway through, his spectatorial position outside of the genre. The play does not end here, however. He ultimately blurs the line that separates these two roles—performer and spectator—making the exact nature of the speaker's relationship to elegiac experience, and the elegiac subject position, indeterminate.

The first section of the paper considers the opening of the poem, in which the speaker seeks to ascertain the identity of Pyrrha's lover, as a quasi-elegiac performance. On a first reading, the dramatic situation appears to be a love triangle, and anaphora and redundancy suggest the heightened emotion of lament. The meter (fourth Asclepiadean) displays an affinity with elegy, since its first line begins with a spondee and a choriamb followed by a caesura, a unit which could begin either line of the elegiac distich.

Although the first line may start off metrically like a line of elegy, the end of the line deviates from the expectations the beginning has established. On a larger scale, the form of the poem mirrors the form of its first line, seeming to announce elegy at its opening but then veering away from it. A verb in the third person, *flebit*, displaces mourning from the speaker onto the figure whom we had taken to be his rival, inaugurating the second section of the poem, in which

the speaker appears in the guise of elegiac spectator. The language of the poem continues to evoke elegy, notably in the erotic use of *fidem* and *miseri*.

A gesture at the end of the poem purports to explain the speaker's position on the outside of amatory suffering. Drawing on a "sea of love" metaphor that has run through the poem, the speaker describes having dedicated his drenched clothes to a sea god. Even in describing this dedicatory act, Horace emphasizes his position on the outside of elegy. I compare this passage to two depictions of dedication from near-contemporary poems, Propertius 3.24-25 and *Heroides* 15. In all three, dedication demarcates two phases of life marked by distinct values and suggestive of distinct literary genres (on *Heroides* 15, cf. Davis 2005). However, the fact that elegiac verse is used for inscriptions allows Ovid and Propertius the luxury of a fiction—that the poem is or contains the dedicatory inscription itself. We may contrast this with Horace's use of indirect speech. He tells us what his votive tablet *indicat*. His discursive removal from the dedication echoes his discursive removal from lament earlier in the poem, emphasizing his position on the outside of the elegiac genre.

Despite the closure that this gesture trumpets, throughout the poem Horace blurs the lines between elegiac performer and elegiac spectator, making it impossible to pin his speaker down. I explore several of the mechanisms by which he encourages ambiguity, including the fact that the grammatical structure of the poem allows for two separate readings, one in which he is the speaker of the opening elegiac performance and another in which it is Pyrrha's lover. At the end of the paper, I suggest that this generic play prepares us for the next poem, 1.6, in which Horace assimilates his poetry to elegy as a way of "getting out of" engaging in political speech.

## Works Cited

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