Horace writes his final poem in his original collection of odes in the same meter as his first. Both poems discuss what Horace thinks will set him apart from both the rabble and other poets. In Horace’s first ode, he promises, “Quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres/ sublimi feriam sidera vertice.” (But if you should place me among the lyric poets, I will strike the stars with my lofty top. 1.1.35-36) In his last one, he declares that he has completed his task: “Exegi monumentum aere perennius.” (I have built a monument more lasting than bronze.) (3.30.1) In Ode 3.30, Horace constructs a poem that serves as the capstone to his work, and in it he describes the effect of poetry on its author in a very nuanced way. Horace describes how he starts as a builder and then becomes a legendary part of his poems and finally, how he is completely subsumed by his work. While the question of how Horace presents an image of himself to his audience has been examined methodically,¹ I would like to reverse process and look at how Horace prepares his audience to make their own images of him.

Horace begins by describing himself as a builder. “Exegi monumentum aere perennius.” (3.30.1) “Exegi” can be translated as “I completed;”² it contains a sense of motion and also a sense of separation. In many contexts, the word can even mean to drive something away from oneself. Horace is building something up and out. When Horace says he has built a monument more lasting than bronze, he could either mean he has built a literary memorial that will last longer than a bronze monument, or he could mean he has built a monument more lasting than bronze money. The reading of a bronze monument is bolstered by two things. The poem elides “monumentum” and “aere” so that although they are not grammatically connected, they are pronounced as one word. Also, the next line continues with comparisons to physical objects,

¹ For the most recent (I think) study on Horace’s image-creation, see McNeill (2001).
specifically the royal site of the pyramids; from this we may infer a more tactile image in the first line. Horace starts with rhetorical fireworks by opening his poem about poetry with hard, physical images. However, the idea of Horace constructing a monument lasting longer than money certainly fits Horace’s theme and makes one facet of a statement he will develop throughout his ode. Coins were constantly being issued for various new rulers, events, what have you. Horace is taking on the competition for glory offered by wealth and political ambition and authority. One the one hand, he claims that the fame associated with his literary monument has more staying power than wealth. On the other hand, Horace claims that artistic fame is more stable than the political kind.

Horace continues his comparison, describing his work as “higher than the royal site of the pyramids.” (“Regalique situ pyramidum altius.”) Some have seen this line as referring to “royal rubble” and that Horace is already seeing the pyramids wasted by the elements. This interpretation solves the problem of the transferred epithet: the epithet “royal” modifies the “situ” and not the pyramids themselves. In this reading, “regali” actually does refer to “situ” instead of “pyramidum.” This is an attractive solution, owing to the descriptive “altius.” Horace’s poetry will still be standing tall, but the pyramids will collapse. However, the pyramids are very solid. Even to this day, they have not collapsed. I think that “altius” here ought to be translated as loftier, because Horace is making another comment about political power. The pyramids and politics themselves are quite “earthbound.” The thing which Horace has constructed is both a “higher,” or more beautiful, thing, and one that is loftier in that it is not

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3 See for example Quinn (1980) and Gibson (1997). Gibson especially has an intriguing explanation for the appearance of pyramids in this ode. He brings forward the story of a man marking his name in the pyramids and setting up monuments to himself all over Egypt and punished by Augustus for his ambition, in a story related by Cassius Dio. Gibson claims that Horace is referencing this story as a warning against ambition. Although I do not favor the theory because the adjectives (altius, regali) more easily mesh with physical permanence, the idea of a Horatian “morality tale” warning against political ambition is interesting to think about.
affected by the same troubles that affect royalty. Specifically, his reference to royalty here refers to Cleopatra and the Ptolemies. Again, by referring to the “situ” or the physical base of the pyramids, he points out that although dynasties crumble (Cleopatra’s having been ended by Caesar), poetry remains loftier than political power. And, Horace seems to imply, loftier because of his own skill as builder.

Horace has just set up two images of lasting things, bronze and pyramids, and described his own work with comparatives, more perennial and loftier. He has used very physical descriptions and has indirectly linked himself to the craftsmen of monuments and pyramids, so it’s only fitting that in line three he moves to the immediate enemies of physical things, rain and wind. He says, “quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens/ possint diruere.” “Which neither devouring rain nor raging Aquilo are able to destroy.” (3.30.3-4) Rain and Aquilo the North Wind are described as “edax” and “impotens” respectively. Gluttonously devouring and raging are not two adjectives that an artful craftsman would consider positive. The personification of the elements set up a nice contrast between unbalanced, unhinged natural strength and calm, focused craftsmanship. Although Horace is not explicitly stating that his work will last because of its Stoic qualities, he is drawing a comparison between things that destroy and things that build. Also, the asyndeton creates a rush as we hear the different elements hasten to attempt to destroy the monument. It is a powerful denial. Not the ravenous rain, not the howling wind are able to destroy.

Horace weakens his word picture by adding to his list after the main verbs of the clause. He has created a powerful image of what will not destroy his work; however, by adding “aut innumerabilis/ annorum series et fuga temporum,” (“the march of uncountable years or the flight of time”) the poet brings our focus back to the forces arrayed against permanence instead of

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4 For Horace and mediocritas, see Lowrie (1997), specifically pp. 79-82.
permanence’s victory. This “doubling back” on a theme would damage a simple narrative.

Horace takes a risk. Also, the nature of this threat is different. Instead of something physical and uncontrolled, the years and time seem inexorable. By placing “series” and “fuga” next to each other, Horace creates a picture of an ebb and flow. The “series” is an advance like a military column. The “fuga” is, likewise, a military retreat. Although the words themselves do not refer to an actual battle, the idea of time as a war in which sides are constantly advancing or retreating vivifies the idea of a monument greater than war or war heroes. As stated, the threat here is different. We have moved out of the physical: the intangible “innumerable years and time” cause a host of not-yet-seen tangible effects, and the placement of the intangible after the main verb creates a lingering, ghost-like image. The audience wanders in between language about the physical and the not. The words on the page claim that Horace has defeated the intangible, but, because of a dramatic after thought, the reader is not so sure.

Horace, to explain away the reader’s fear, changes his personification from that of a builder to that of a part of his poem. He claims “I will not wholly die.” “Non omnis moriar.” (3.30.6) Throughout this entire poem, Horace places his verbs at the beginning of his lines for emphasis. Here, however, he holds off to emphasize the negation. “Non omnis” he says. The alliteration of the line (“Non omnis moriar multaque par mei”) emphasizes his death but also the “much part” of him. The strength of the emphasis unites the two concepts. The “non omnis” part is not adverbial: Horace isn’t saying he won’t die completely. He’s saying that not all of him will die. This is the first stage in his movement from existence outside his poetry to existence totally inside. He uses “multa” instead of “magna” when talking of his surviving part because the part is not a great, as in grand, part but a quantitatively large one. Horace is saying his poetry is a very
significant, perhaps the most significant, part of him, and Horace already links himself with his
poetry in an earthy way.

Having described poetry’s lastingness and his own relationship to his poems, Horace
continues his movement from external, autonomous existence to internal existence with “Usque
ego postera/ crescam laude recens.” (3.30.8) “Always, I will increase fresh with latter praise.”
Horace created a monument, but now he himself is being increased. “Crescam” could also mean
“I will be born.” In this sense, a new Horace is being born continuously from the praises of
others. Personally, I prefer the reading of “increase” because it meshes with what has preceded in
the poem: much part of him will evade Libitina. He does not claim that he will be reborn or
somehow, in his person, defeat death. He uses the language of parts in the previous line and the
idea of parts increasing or decreasing logically follows in this line. Leaving behind the building
imagery from the previous lines, here Horace has adopted an organic image. He is growing fresh.
This is the middle stage. First there was the completed, solid, and still “exegi” of the first line.
Later, there will be the simple future “dicar.” This is the intermediate step between Horace as
builder and Horace as relayed down in his poems.

Harkening back to his language of political power, Horace claims that he will survive
“for as long as the pontifex with the silent virgin ascends the Capitolium.” (3.30.8-9) Horace
didn’t write weighty poetry, so it seems strange that he would link his existence with the pontifex
maximus, a man laden with gravitas. From my translation, it looks like Horace claims that he
will last as long as the Roman state. He’s dealt with political power previously, so this makes
sense, but the references to the pontifex and temple complicate things. If, however, we look back
to his first ode, the puzzle makes a little more sense. In Ode 1.1, he claims “Ivy, the reward of
learned brows, mixes me with the gods above.” (1.1.29-30) He calls himself and his peers
“vates” or “seers.” He talks of himself in a religious sense. I think that in this line about the pontifex, he draws a comparison to the pontifex and vestal and himself and his muse. Horace is creating a new religious order, parallel to the orthodox one. Just as he claimed that he would last longer than political heroes and victories, Horace places himself on par with the head of Roman religion, as both were involved in rituals of cosmic significance.

Horace begins his final image of his ode, before its denouement, with the most brilliant depiction of literary immortality: simply “dicar.” “I will be spoken.” (3.30.10) This is the last stage of Horace’s transformation from person to legend, and the stages can be traced through Horace’s use of first person verbs at the beginnings of his lines: first, “exegi” signifying his control over his work; then, “non omnis moriar” to describe the weird place between death and life for a poet whose work is recalled and that memory mixed with memory of the poet himself. Finally, the memory of the poet is forgotten and simply “dicar.” He will be spoken. Now, “dicar” does have a direct object. Horace will be called “great from humble origins, a leader,” (3.30.12-13) but the nearly two lines separating “dicar” from its object make it seem like it stands alone. Between the verb and object lies “Where violent Aufidus roars and where Daunus, poor of water, ruled a rural people.” (3.30.10-12) Horace’s three references (Capitolium, Aufidus, and Daunus) all get further and further away from immediate memory for a citizen of Rome. The Capitol was something the Roman could have touched, just like Horace while he was alive. The Aufidus, an important river of Southern Italy,5 was real, but as a historical landmark, it did not come with a sure, human-driven history. Finally, Daunus was a legendary king and the father of Turnus,6 and no one would have had firsthand knowledge of him. In the same way, Horace would have gone through a period in which his poetry and his person would have been tied together by

contemporaries and acquaintances. Then, he would have become legendary and subordinate to his poetry. Notice that all three of these references occur in a similar area. They all exist in Italy, and the Aufidus and Daunus are both linked with Horace’s native Apulia. Horace is making a nationalistic point here. What remain in a native’s consciousness are a geographical sensitivity and a recollection of past heroes. Legends assume the force of nature. This is why Horace’s poetry will last.

Horace finally claims that he will be called a powerful founder from humble origins, having led Aeolian song to Italic meters. (3.30.13-14) Aeolian refers to the complicated rhythms employed by Greek poets. Horace, however, is drawing a clever parallel between his own and his friend Vergil’s work. Horace describes himself as a “princeps” or founder/leader. Like Aeneas, he led an epic voyage from the coast of Asia Minor to Italy. In the same way that Aeneas brought to the Romans Greek grandeur and epic past, Horace brought to a rustic language the sophisticated style of the Hellenes. Horace was able to write Latin poetry in adapted Greek meter, but this is not exactly what he says in this ode. He says that he brought Aeolian song to Italic meters because he brought the style of the Greeks and their content to Italy. Essentially, he claims that he was able to write Greek poetry in Latin, and, to extend the Aeneas comparison, not just through his own work but through the work he has enabled, Horace will be remembered as a founder.

For this reason, he claims that the muse should “take up pride sought with worthiness and willingly gird my hair with the Delphic laurel.” (3.30.14-15) The haughtiness shines through in his use of “superbiam” (“pride”) as a positive word instead of with the normal negative connotation it usually carries. Whereas in Ode 1.1 he commented that ivy, the reward for learned brows mixed him with the gods (1.1.29-30), here he refers to Delphic laurel. Apollo was the god
of lyric poetry but also of prophecy. What started as an intellectual building project had morphed into a religious ritual.

In these last two lines using imperatives, Horace ties up his poem and suddenly turns it into an apostrophe. Important questions in Horatian scholarship include just how we define lyric, how Horace respects his genre, and how the relationship between lyric and narrative forms can be defined. I would like to suggest that the idea of that a poet’s individual identity transforming to the identity of a poem offers one insight into these questions. The poet himself creates lyric poetry, but the transformation creates a narrative because of a shift in perspective. Horace started with self-description in the first person. He marked his transformation from builder to legend to pure poet. Because he can speak from this stage as a purely retroactively-created person derived from his work, he (meaning the weird mix of Horace and Ode) can command the muse. When the muse girds Horace the person with laurel, she is enshrining him as a recollected idea. Although the things that Horace sings of may be blown out of proportion, like the fons Bandusiae or his Sabine farm, his fame will last since the muse has set the idea of Horace apart as one of her special ones. Horace, at the end of his career, loses control over the works that he has built. They become property of the muse, and this is how Horace gains his immortality.

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7 See Lowrie (1997) for a consistent approach to these issues through the framework of the narrative vs. lyric debate.
Bibliography