

BOOK REVIEW

Horace's Iambic Criticism: Casting Blame (Iambikê Poiêsis). By TIMOTHY S. JOHNSON. Mnemosyne Supplement 334. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012. Pp. xii + 314. Hardcover, €119.00/\$163.00. ISBN 978-90-04-21523-8.

Although Horace's *Epodes* were frequently dismissed by earlier generations as an uneven poetic collection of obscenity and juvenalia, more recently critics have begun to seriously engage with his first lyric collection. Johnson's important new study offers the first comprehensive English-language monograph on the *Epodes* since R. W. Carrubba's study of poetic arrangement in 1969. As such, Johnson's study makes a vital new companion to Watson's (2003) Oxford commentary, and his serial reading of *Epodes* 1–17 provide students and researchers with a novel interpretation of Horace's triumphal collection. Johnson's engagement with Horace's iambic practice springs from taking seriously Horace's claim at *Epistles* 1.19.24–5 to follow the spirit and meter of Archilochus, but not the words hunting down Lykambes. Over the course of six chapters focused on Horace's iambic criticism in the *Epistles* (Chapter 1), *Epodes* 1–7 (Chapter 2), *Epodes* 8–15 (Chapter 3), *Epodes* 16–17 (Chapter 4), *Odes* Book I (Chapter 5), and the *Ars Poetica* (Chapter 6), Johnson argues that Horace rejects a narrow Archilochean–Lykambid *iambos* that is aimed at domination, rage, and social disruption in *Epodes* 1–7 in favor of a poetics of *polyeideia*, or diversified unity, aimed at creating poetic and social harmony from disparate elements in *Epodes* 8–17, continued in *Odes* Book I and ultimately reflected in the theory of poetic unity in the *Ars Poetica*.

Horace's iambic poetics are characterized by “transgression–response–fusion” (8–15), where his poems transgress assumed literary and social limits and can include abuse and obscenity. Transgression here makes opposing characters, perspectives, and emotions coexist within a single song or poetry book. By allowing divergences to be heard and brought into a relationship, iambic transgression can unify. The result is poetry characterized by the fusion of reciprocal song. Johnson thus argues for the positive social value of Horatian *iambos*. His poems, through their relationship to ritual, festive, and comic models of *iambos* exemplified in the stories of Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Archilo-

chus' mocking encounter with the Muses, employ transgression to achieve community rather than to shame a target. Across the span of his reading of the *Epodes* themselves, Johnson builds a persuasive case that *iambos* can create positive social and poetic outcomes.

Much as ritual creates community, Johnson argues, Horace's iambics replace the singular domination of the Lykambid iambic tradition with a multivocal poetry that negotiates a sense of community. Yet the precise linkage to the ritual side is weak and it is unclear how Horace's *Epodes* relate to the story of Iambe or to the story of Archilochus and his cow from the Parian Mnesiepes inscription. While Johnson cites (64–74) a connection between the ritual exchange of lampoons in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and Horace's resounding lyre in his own Hymn to Hermes (*Odes* 3.11.3–4) and points to Horace's suitcase packed with Archilochus and the Greek comedians at *Satires* 2.3.11–12, this evidence does not make a substantive connection between Horace's poetics and the *Hymn to Demeter* or to the post-Archaic testimonia of Archilochus' life.

Chapter 3 (on *Epodes* 8–15) and Chapter 4 (on *Epodes* 16–17) offer Johnson's most compelling new arguments. In Chapter 3, Johnson argues for the strength of the iambist in contrast with a dominant critical strand of reading Horace's *iambi* as characterized by literary, physical, and political *impotentia*, seen in Fitzgerald, Oliensis, Barchiesi, and Harrison.¹ In the second half of his *Epodes* book, Horace defends the power of his poetry by "putting doubts about his iambic power into the mouths of others, patrons (epode 1, 14) and enraged lovers (epode 8, 12) and ... defends himself ... placing the charges that he is weak within the context of his most potent attacks" (41). For Johnson, *Epodes* 11–15 demonstrate how Horace incorporates alternate literary types and their multiple outlooks into his iambics. *Epode* 11, for example, becomes a fusion of two competing poetic modes, the "hardness" of invective *iambos* and the "softness" of erotic elegiac modes (139–42). Iambic becomes more than "hard" invective poetry, restricted to Archilochean abusive retaliation, but instead creates unity out of

¹ W. Fitzgerald, "Power and Impotence in Horace's Epodes," *Ramus* 17 (1988) 176–91; E. Oliensis, "Canidia, Canicula, and the Decorum of Horace's Epodes," *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 107–38; A. Barchiesi, "Horace and Iambos: The Poet as Literary Historian," in A. Cavarzere, A. Aloni, and A. Barchiesi (eds.), *Iambic Ideas: Essays on a Poetic Tradition from Archaic Greece to the Late Roman Empire* (Lanham, MD, 2001) 141–64; S. Harrison, "Some Generic Problems in Horace's Epodes: Or, On (Not) Being Archilochus," *ibid.* 165–86.

competing perspectives. This reading greatly expands the ideas proposed by Luck, Barchiesi, and Harrison in terms of Horace's generic enrichment of *iambos*.² Where earlier criticism examined individual poems, Johnson sees such generic interactions as a broad trend giving shape to the second half of the Epode book, and leading to his newly synthetic view of Horatian *iambos* as polyphonic *polyeideia*.

In Chapter 4, the reading of *Epode* 16 is also compelling and original. In response to the dystopian vision of a Rome once again overwhelmed by civil war, the poem most overtly represents iambic as ritual and the poet becomes an Iambe figure, who offers a vision of hopefulness, and becomes "the one who knows how to confront Rome and lead her out of her warring mentality and pain" (162). The iambist does not doubt the power of his song, but instead offers it up in order to reconstruct Roman society.

Johnson's readings speak to a sophisticated reader who has spent many years at work on Horatian criticism, and he contributes a valuable discussion of the Roman reception of Archilochus, not found in other recent critics of *iambos* who have largely concentrated upon the Greek evidence. Moreover, Johnson's work shows exemplary control over the frequently obscure *Epodes* bibliography, and his serial approach to each of the *Epodes* allows for him to engage fully with his fellow critics. A final notable feature is Johnson's use of the scholarly note. The generous notes often carry on an entire second line of argument in which Johnson engages prior Horatian critics from Heinze to Lowrie (2009). While it is challenging to restate Johnson's complex arguments concisely, his many original readings of the *Epodes* warrant the serious attention of students and scholars alike interested in Horace's poetry.

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² G. Luck, "An Interpretation of Horace's Eleventh Epode," *ICS* 1 (1976) 122–6; A. Barchiesi, "Alcune difficoltà nella carriera di un poeta giambico: Giambo ed elegia nell'epodo XI," in R. Cortès Tovar and J. C. Fernandez Corte (eds.) *Bimilenario de Horacio* (Salamanca, 1994); id., "Final Difficulties in an Iambic Poet's Career: Epode 17," in M. Lowrie, ed. *Horace: Odes and Epodes* (Oxford, 2009), 232–46; S. Harrison (above, n. 1).