

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY: AN ORGANISING PRINCIPLE IN HORACE'S *EPODES*?

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Over the years there have been various attempts to make sense of the *Epodes* as a collection, as well as of individual poems.<sup>1</sup> Scholars who have focussed on the collection as a whole have tried generally grouping the poems according to metre<sup>2</sup> or to subject matter into either different areas of criticism or different categories of invective.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent scholarly debate centred on arguments why individual groups were identified and why a specific poem should fall into a specific group.

My personal reaction to these attempts to structure the collection according to groups is rather negative for the following simple reason: too many persuasive alternatives are possible. No musical composition could at one and the same time be described for instance as a sonata, a suite or a prelude and fugue. If a piece of music displays characteristics of all these musical forms, a broader organisational principle has to be found to accommodate the individual sections. In the same way then – since so many different possible ways have been identified in which to pack out various groups of *Epodes* – it seems to make more sense to look at the *Epodes* as a unit in which a variety of cross-references or, to continue the musical analogy, variations on a theme, all support a central statement.

There have also been scholars who focused on individual poems who have come up with striking or even ingenious individual interpretations, but more often than not they then ignored or discounted the larger unit in which the poems functioned. Just to focus on individual poems seemed to undermine the impact made by the collection as a whole. It seemed to me that a simple middle step was missing in both these general approaches. The collection as a whole should make more than just organisational sense and individual poems should make sense both as single poems as well as parts of a larger whole.

In this article I plan to look at the *Epodes* as literature reflecting a certain human reality. I do not intend to argue the possible date of each poem, nor do I plan to link specific historic events to references in some of the *Epodes*.<sup>4</sup> In this reading

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1 R. Carrubba's *The Epodes of Horace: Study in poetic movement* (1969) was dedicated to just such an effort. He includes a variety of the attempts of his predecessors.

2 Cf. Hierche 1974:5: "Horace aurait donc groupé ses épodes en utilisant, comme seul critère, le mètre: indifférent aux sujets ou à la longueur des pièces." Williams also identifies a metrical arrangement for the collection in *Greece and Rome* 1972.

3 This group includes scholars who have concentrated on the principles governing the arrangement of the poems (Carrubba 1964). Carrubba (1964:24-26) further gives a summary of the themes used in the past for organising the *Epodes* into groups. Hierche (1974) have chapters on the "structure formelle", "structure intellectuelle" and "structure métrique" of the *Epodes*.

4 It seems generally accepted (Manikin 1995:10) that the *Epodes* reflect a response to specific historical events and that composition took place from about 40 BC to 30 BC. People living in this period must have experienced these years as most unsettling, since Octavian's establishment as

the *Epodes* are not merely “a response to the historical events of the late thirties BC” (Mankin 1995:10). They are one man’s attempt to make sense of the society in which he found himself.<sup>5</sup> The *Epodes* seem further to reflect a world in immediate crisis rather than the more balanced perspective accompanying a more settled state of political affairs under Augustus as subsequently reflected in the Odes and especially in the fourth book of the Odes.<sup>6</sup>

And if we agree with Thucydides that the future will resemble the past (1.22), Horace’s criticism of society in the turbulent times in which he lived, could also inform our understanding of society in our own equally disturbing times where a “solution” to problems (whether political or economic) cannot always be anticipated.<sup>7</sup> In his *Epodes* (or *Iambi* to use his own name for the poems)<sup>8</sup> Horace points out what is dangerous, what is inappropriate or what could be a threat to the individual as well as to contemporary society. By his poetry the poet sets or implies a standard against which reality can be measured. This standard is not necessarily spelled out in detail and is often only suggested.

I therefore looked for a single purpose behind the collection in terms of which each of the poems, including the more uncomfortable ones like *Epodes* 5, 8, 10 or 12, would still make sense. It further seemed feasible that this central idea would be reflected – at least to a certain degree – in each individual unit which contributes to the whole.

It is the contention of this article that the *Epodes* especially reflect Horace’s struggle to come to terms with a Rome that has become a global village (to use the modern idiom) but whose own house is not in order. And if Rome’s house is not in order, individual inhabitants are threatened. In short, the *Epodes* spell out that what happens on the larger stage of the world can have devastating effects on the life of the individual. Strangely enough, the *Epodes* also seem to suggest the reverse: if the individual is threatened, society as a whole is at risk.<sup>9</sup> It is the aim of this article to

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an effective emperor and the final achievement of the *Pax Romana* could not have been foreseen in any way. See Carrubba 1964:3 for a list of scholar’s dates for individual *Epodes*. See further Nisbet’s (1984:1-18) excellent exposition of the connection between the *Epodes* and History.

5 Cf. Shackleton Bailey (1982:8-9) who describes the collection of *Epodes* as being “heterogeneous like no other collection in classical literature, not only in topics but in tone and essence.”

6 Furthermore, I find the *Epodes* of much more inherent interest than a mere example of “early experimental work” (Costa & Binns 1973:vii).

7 Contra Lyne (1995:27) who argues that Horace deliberately avoided political comments in the years before Actium: “We can say that what he (Horace) is *not* before Actium is *political*.”

8 It can also be accepted that a poet who claims relationship with his literary predecessors, is aware of the implications of this relationship (*Ep.* 1.19.23-5). See the chapter on *Epodes* and Satires in Perret (1964:33-67) who emphasizes the “presence of a literary universe” (34) and an “intellectual milieu” (67) in which Horace wrote. If Horace, therefore, calls his poems *Iambi* he continues the Greek as well as the Latin tradition of writing invective or blame poetry in mainly iambic metre.

9 Cf. Oliensis (1991:125) who explains that the “misogyny of the *Epodes* may be understood as a variation on a traditional theme which attributes the decline of Rome to the sexual misconduct of Roman women”.

trace this aspect, the symbiosis between individual and state, as a unifying or organisational principle for the *Epodes* as a whole.

When we look at the collection of *Epodes* it is clear that the position of an individual is influenced quite fundamentally by the larger stage of society on which he finds himself. This *leitmotiv* is sounded very clearly right from the first. *Epode* 1 might start with a singular verb (*ibis*, v.1) and a vocative (*amice*, v.2) which implies a close personal relationship between two individuals but the position of the state, encroaches overwhelmingly in the intermingling references to a supreme commander and every type of danger (*Caesar* and *omne periculum*, v.3). In its opening statement the collection of *Epodes* already focuses on the interrelatedness of individual and society, of personal fate and public fortune. The happiness of the individual and something as basic to human society as friendship, are described as being dependent on the position in which the state finds itself.

In *Epode* 1 the suggestion implied is that the worst position for any state to be in, is war. The worst position for a state's citizens to be in, would therefore be to have to go to war on behalf of this state, just as Horace is forced to do here. Horace's question "what about us?" (*quid nos?*, v.15) expresses the age-old resentment of the individual when society's demands impinge on or even thwart individual aspirations.<sup>10</sup>

In *Epode* 1 Horace examines the motivation an individual might have for going off to war. Some people, like Maecenas, might go to war because of political loyalty, to secure Octavian's position (vv. 3-4). Most people would go to war for gain (vv.23-30). Ironically Horace is prepared to go to war for his own sake since he will experience less fear for his friend's safety in reality than in his imagination: *comes minore sum futurus in metu, qui maior absentis habet* ("as your companion I shall be less dogged by fear – [since] a greater fear grips those who are absent", vv.17-18). This motivation implies scathing criticism on a personal and social level of war. War interferes in one of the most basic of human relationships – that between friends. Ironically, this war also happens to take place between Romans, people bound to each other by some of the closest human ties. There can be no compelling reason for such a war to take place at all.

In *Epode* 1 then Horace debates the decision to go to war, while suggesting that his motivation for joining is in direct opposition to the motivation to fight a civil war. The entire central section of *Epode* 1 describes aspects of a close relationship between friends (vv. 5-22). This bond of friendship motivates Horace to go to war. The lengthy description of Horace's motivation implies a questioning of other people's motivation for going to the same war. It also implies moral criticism of the decision to go to war, since this war will undermine those very ties of which Horace's friendship is a striking example. Towards the end of the poem Horace goes even further. Again his own position is held up as a standard to which participants in the war do not adhere. Horace goes to war for friendship's sake and not for greed. By

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10 It is significant that *Epode* 1 already anticipates ideas spelled out clearly only in *Epode* 16 where Horace implies that the only solution for the problem that is Rome is for its citizens to leave the country.

implication the other participants go because of personal enmity (not friendship) and greed (not being satisfied with *satis superque*, “enough and more than enough”, v.31). This exemplifies a fundamental perversion of the Roman ideal of the individual sacrificing himself for the good of the collective citizenry or the state. Variations on the *leitmotiv* sounded by *Epode* 1 will be introduced in every single *Epode* in the collection.

At the same time this first *Epode* can be seen as a kind of literary *bon voyage* poem or *propempticon*. The reader (as well as Horace and Maecenas) is on the point of departing on a literary journey of which the outcome can be pleasing (*iucunda*, v.6) or tiresome (*gravis*, v.6) depending on the final destination reflected in the *Epodes*. Ironically, *Epode* 10 is a “real” propempticon, but an inverted one. The ship in *Epode* 10 sets sail under evil auspices (*mala...avite*, v.1). The power of nature is called down to wreck this ship, not to preserve it. The ship happens to carry one Mevius who apparently must be expelled to avert the anger of the gods. In this inverted propempticon, the end of the journey is foreseen where the passenger does survive the shipwreck only to become the sacrificial meal – an act of expiation for impiety previously committed.

If this is the type of “journey’s end” envisaged by *Epode* 10, it is clear that the literary journey on which *Epode* 1 sends the reader, is highly dangerous. Furthermore, the reader, as fellow passenger, is directly reminded of these dangers in a poem such as *Epode* 10. Of course the ship of state is at this time an accepted metaphor, so that referring to ships (*Epode* 1.1) or a single ship (*Epode* 10) could also imply that the ship of state is run aground in *Epode* 10.20. It seems then that Horace is not only extremely sceptical about the journey upon which the state, as exemplified by Maecenas, is embarking in *Epode* 1. To his mind even the survival of the state is at issue. In this sense *Epode* 10 prepares the way for the point of view reflected in *Epode* 16 where Horace advises his fellow citizens to leave Rome for a better life elsewhere.

It seems significant that at specific points in a collection of seventeen poems the poet should refer to journeys. In *Epode* 1 the journey is undertaken, albeit unwillingly, to join in the fighting of a civil war. In *Epode* 10 a shipwreck is preferred to a continuation of a disastrous voyage and in *Epode* 16 prospective voyagers are sent in a diametrically opposite direction to the one required to join the current war. Horace advises his fellow travellers not only to go west rather than east, but more significantly he also implies that the only real escape voyage open to him and his fellow Romans lies in the realm of the imagination, not in reality.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the first *Epode* individual and state have been directly linked. If in what follows, the state is at risk, the individual too is at risk and if the individual is incapable of handling his personal situation, that same impotence seems to be transferred to the state.

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11 Cf. for instance Ableitinger-Grünberger (1971:83) who maintains that “Horaz die Bürgerkriege nicht in erster Linie als Ausdruck einer bestimmten historisch-politischen Situation ansieht, sondern als ein Signum menschlicher ‘impietas’ im politischen Bereich”.

Since the second *Epode*<sup>12</sup> ostensibly sings of the joys of country life the war *leitmotiv* seems to have been dropped rather precipitously.<sup>13</sup> If we look at the poem in more detail, however, it contributes very directly to the development of the overall theme of the *Epodes*. The money-lender, Alfius, is contemplating a move to the country (*iam iam futurus rusticus*, “I’m on the verge of becoming a farmer”, v.68). Alfius however, has little understanding of country life. He has expectations of the results of country life with no concept at all of the hard work involved to produce those results or the very real possibility that things may not turn out as expected. Alfius wants the country to be as he imagines it to be.<sup>14</sup> *Epode 2* therefore seems to criticise a lack of understanding of the broader reality involved, which would apply equally to a city slicker contemplating becoming a gentleman farmer or on a much larger scale a local political leader contemplating becoming a supreme commander.

Ironically, at the end of the poem the banker, Alfius, has the sense to stick to his own world, to *dream* one thing, but to *do* the other, to choose the reality he knows (*omnem redegit Idibus pecuniam quaerit Kalendas ponere*, “he foreclosed on all outstanding debts on the 15th in order to lend them out again on the first”, vv.69-70) rather than the dream he imagines (vv.67-70). The implied criticism of war-mongering is there, for those who want to see it. Civil war, after all, is a war of choice. It is clear then that *Epode 2* is a blame poem. Alfius’ praise of the country is inappropriate and unrealistic. He misses the full consequences of his proposed move to the country. In the same way war might seem a desirable option when the full consequences of such an action remain obscure. It is the supreme irony of the poem that economic realities prove to be easier to grasp for a userer like Alfius, than political realities seem to be to for those making political decisions.

*Epode 2* is also linked to the war theme via its clear connection with *Epode 16*.<sup>15</sup> Here the Roman people as a whole are urged to look for a better life elsewhere

12 Cf. Musurillo (1971:373-381) for a summary of arguments for not reading *Epode 2* as a parody. Musurillo, however, does admit the “obvious contradiction in the tone of the poem” (1971:378).

13 Cf., however, Kiessling and Heinze (1960:490-498) who state: “ein makarismós als Jambus ist ein Widerspruch in sich.”

14 This is a direct link to the other escape to the “Golden Age” *Epode* in the collection, *Epode 16*. Ironically, one of the characteristics of the Golden Age is of course the absence of war, which in turn links *Epode 2* to the “war” *Epodes* such as *Epode 1, 7 and 16*.

15 The most obvious proof of the link between *Epode 2* and *Epode 16* is found in a desire for an idyllic Golden Age characterized by an absence of war and an abundance of material blessings expressed by both poems. A further connection is made by the verbal echoes in *Epode 16* of the reference to the country herd in *Epode 2* (*aut in reducta valle mugientium prospectat errantes greges*, vv.11-12). In *Epode 2* the prospective escapee from the rat-race savours his idyllic circumstances from a *reducta valle* and at a distance (*prospectat*). He is both secluded from outside influences and even the “ideal” countryside is not intruding in any real or obtrusive way. In *Epode 16* another escape from reality is described. In this case the escape is from civil war and the link between the state and the flock is made explicit: *eamus omnis exsecrata civitas, aut pars indocili melior grege* (vv.36-37). The place of escape shares the characteristics of Alfius’ ideal countryside. The flocks give willingly what in other circumstances are demanded of them (*illic iniussae veniunt ad mulctra capellae refertque tanta grex amicus ubera*, vv.49-50). More importantly in this idyllic place of escape unbridled cosmic fury is never unleashed on the flock (*nullius astri gregem aestuasa torret impotentia*, v.62).

(*malis carere quaeritis laboribus*, “you [should] try to escape these terrible times”, v.16), since the hardships accepted in *Epode 1* (*hunc laborem mente laturo*, “[we] shall suffer this hardship in our mind”, v.9; *rogas, tuum labore quid iuvem meo*, “you ask how I may lessen your hardship by [bearing] mine”, v.15) have proven to be self-destructive (*suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit*, “and Rome herself is destroyed by her own people”, *Epode 16.2*). In *Epode 16*, like in *Epode 2*, the speaker anticipates an idyllic life elsewhere, but equally realistically also chooses his own (poetic) reality at the end of the poem. Alfius goes for immediate economic opportunity. The poet-prophet of *Epode 16* chooses a happy escape (*secunda...fuga*, v.66) from the world of war into the world of the imagination, leaving the reader with an overriding sense of pessimism about present circumstances since no real escape from them is possible.

Neither is escape possible from the consequences of garlic. Ostensibly *Epode 3* is a witty example of blame poetry or invective. Apparently Horace is suffering from the consequences of a large dose of garlic administered by his friend Maecenas. This innocent prank is described only in terms of its consequences and in such exaggerated terms that the reader soon focuses on the meaning behind the words. It becomes clear that the poem is no light-weight *intermissum* in a collection of serious invective against Rome and the social and political circumstances associated with that city. In reality *Epode 3* is a development of the *leitmotiv* of the entire collection: there is no escape from the consequences of one's actions. The physical reality of one's circumstances is inescapable and as undeniably pervasive as a dose of garlic. This aspect of *Epode 3* also links it to *Epode 16* where the poet advises fleeing the country to escape from reality but ends up by admitting the impossibility of just such an escape. Furthermore, in a very straightforward way *Epode 3* also displays links with all the other *Epodes* in the collection where civil war, that most serious collective action with the most dire consequences for the individual, is discussed. Garlic, after all, sets one Roman against another. It undermines even the most natural of relationships, that between a man and a woman: *manum puella savio opponat tuo, extrema et in sponda cubet* (“your girlfriend may put her hand between your kiss and lie on the edge of the bed”, *Epode 3.21-22*).

*Epode 4* subtly picks up on the specifics under discussion in *Epode 3*. Garlic separates people physically just as successfully as does social intolerance. The difference between *Epode 3* and *Epode 4* is one of tone, not substance.<sup>16</sup> At least the division created by garlic between people is not permanent. The consequences created by intolerance and the type of “hatred of the other” described by *Epode 4* is civil war.<sup>17</sup> This type of hatred of the other is described as if it were a natural occurrence: like the enmity between prey for the predator who feeds on it. Prey and predator, however, do not belong to the same species. Right at the beginning of *Epode 4* a fundamental objection is therefore levelled at the facile justification by the speaker of his deadly intolerance. The final irony underlying *Epode 4* is that the

16 For *Epode 4* as part of the group of poems on civil war, cf. Perret 1964:49.

17 *Epodes 4, 6 and 10* are grouped together as personal invectives against males, while *Epodes 5, 8, 12 and 17* are linked to this first group as further invective, but against a female (Carrubba 1964:55).

speaker(s) and the object of their hatred are equally reprehensible. Their type of intolerance, pitting one Roman against another, is the basis for any civil war.

The misguided speaker of *Epode* 4 considered the enmity between citizens generally as natural as that between the lamb and the wolf. *Epode* 5 illustrates this enmity specifically between two representatives of Roman society. A Roman woman who may even be a Roman matron, starves a young Roman boy to death in order to obtain some of his body parts for a magic potion. In this poem nature's laws are again reversed – even spectacularly reversed. In the first two lines of the poem a fleeting reference to the gods in heaven and human beings on earth would suggest a universe in which an ordinary society is taken for granted quite naturally. The remainder of the poem, however, reflects a complete inversion of normal society values: the individual becomes the prey of the many (*omnium vultus in unum me truces*, “the savage appearance of all is directed against me alone”, vv.3-4), births of children are cast in doubt (*si vocata partibus Lucina veris adfuit*, “if Lucina, when summoned, came to [aid] an honest birth”, vv.5-6), citizenship offers neither advantage nor guarantee (*inane purpurae decus*, “by the empty sign of my status”, v. 7) and not a real mother, but a stepmother, like a wild beast (*belua*, v.10) directs the action (*noverca me intueris*, “a stepmother stares at me”, v.9). In short, *Epode* 5 describes a “mother” figure, Canidia, who murders a young boy, and with it the hope of a nation for the future. An older woman, normally the bearer and nurturer of the next generation, callously murders a young boy – by starvation. The individual reactions of the perpetrators and the victim of this ritualistic murder are described in ghastly detail.

The epode, however, is clearly focused on this horrible situation with a larger didactic purpose in mind. When an individual, a young Roman citizen, becomes a sacrifice, the purpose of sacrifice in general is questioned. What sacrifices can be made in good conscience for the state to succeed in civil war when each victim is a direct loss to society and Rome herself?

When Canidia, who could be a Roman *matrona*, takes to magic, questions are implied about religion in general. When individuals take to magic, they are grasping for some sort of control. The degree to which deadly magic is practised in this epode, gives an indication of the general state of society where magic has become a travesty of what religion should be, a society where a woman has become a witch and a devastating travesty of what a Roman matron should be. When parents survive their own child, scathing criticism is implied of an activity which causes parents in general to survive their children. In practically every respect the horrible spectacle described in *Epode* 5 all too easily reflect society at large, involved in a disastrous civil war. On this larger canvass, there is little difference between Canidia's sacrifice of a young Roman boy and Rome's sacrifice of its own citizens. Roman citizens have no real interest in the outcome of a civil war. The war is waged to satisfy the ambitions of a few individuals. Canidia's ritual starvation of the boy has the very limited aim of using parts of his body as a love potion. In *Epode* 5 ritual murder just like civil war cannot be justified.

The activities described in *Epode* 5 undermine one of the most solid bases of any normal civil society: the desire to assure its own survival in general and therefore, more specifically, to protect the young of that specific society. In this

*Epode* however, every normal relationship is inverted, to the extent that life becomes a degrading spectacle. The type of perversion encapsulated in one ritualistic murder reflects not only on the individual but on society as well. Rome, like Canidia, has become a perversion of all she should have been. Instead of nurturing her citizens, the hope of the future, she sacrifices them to achieve her own personal ambitions – just like Romulus originally killed his brother to fulfill his individual ambition to found an important city. As final cynical comment the *Epode* points out that those citizens who do survive the initial sacrifice become implicated as witnesses to such atrocity and thus perpetuate the impact on society of the original crime.

By implication Canidia, as representative of Rome, embodies a fundamental perversion of normal social values. In *Epode* 3 Canidia is mentioned as a possible contributor to the garlic dish which caused Horace's complaint. This direct link between the two epodes suggests that the perversion of society which is embodied in someone like Canidia is fundamentally as pervasive and inescapable as the consequences of eating garlic. The scathing criticism of Roman society implied in the link is clear.

Canidia furthermore also features in *Epode* 17, the final poem of the collection. Various aspects of the poem have direct links with other poems throughout the collection but none are as explicit as the link with *Epode* 5 where Canidia murders the young Roman boy. *Epode* 17 puts Canidia in direct confrontation with the poet, who is as helpless against her power as the young Roman boy was shown to be in *Epode* 5.

In *Epode* 17 there is no narrative frame, only direct speech. The poet can only plead his case with words. However, he concedes victory to Canidia in the very first line of the poem: *iam iam efficaci do manus scientiae* ("now finally I yield to your powerful knowledge/skill", v.1). It seems as if the words of the previous sixteen *Epodes* have not been enough. In fact, *Epode* 16 concluded with the poet himself accepting that the only successful escape possible lay in the realm of the imagination. The real evils encroaching upon Rome and society against which the poet spoke out so vociferously in all his *Epodes* have finally overwhelmed both speaker and his community. In *Epode* 17 the poet therefore yields like a captive to a conqueror. He admits his defeat. Canidia and Rome as destructive forces can claim a triumph over the poet's voice of reason. The final irony of course is this triumph is claimed over a fellow citizen, over an own people – not a foreign enemy. The tone of Canidia's final statement is not only triumphant but unrepentant. Did the poet really think that his warnings would be heeded? Did his collection of *Epodes* make any difference at all? There is no lifting the curse of Romulus that pits brother against brother, individual against individual and a people against itself.

The connection between *Epodes* 4, 5, 6 and 17 is clearly summarized in the Latin expression *homo homini lupus est*.<sup>18</sup> Each poem concentrates on the destruction

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18 Cf. 4.1: *lupis et agnis quanta sortito obtigit*; 5.9-10: *aut uti petita ferro belua*; 5.99-100: *post insepulta membra different lupi et Esquilinae alites*; 6.1-2: *canis ignavus adversum lupos*. See the connection made between Canidia (*Epodes* 5 and 17) and *canis* (*Epode* 6) and the dog connection between *Epodes* 6 and 12 by Oliensis (1991:107-138, esp. 111 and 116).



of a fellow citizen (whether in reality or figuratively speaking). In *Epode* 4 the poet seeks to destroy the arrogant upstart with words. Canidia aims to destroy a fellow citizen in *Epode* 5 en 17. The speaker of *Epode* 6 sets out to counteract this destruction through his poetry.<sup>19</sup> Ironically the speaker of *Epode* 6 still thinks he has some control of the situation, unlike Canidia's victims in *Epode* 5 and 17.<sup>20</sup>

By momentarily focusing on the powers of the poet, *Epode* 6 brings some respite, albeit not of a very positive kind, to the relentless account of the destruction of the individual associated with power let loose on Roman society. *Epode* 7 names this destruction by the name for the first time. Civil war is blamed upon the fateful curse laid upon the descendants of Remus to revenge his murder by killing Romulus' descendants.<sup>21</sup> In short this curse (*acerba fata...nepotibus*, "a bitter fate...for posterity", vv.17, 20) obliges the Roman people to perpetuate the original murder of a kinsman by killing one another. And as *Epode* 17 concludes: certain curses cannot be lifted. Furthermore, it has already become clear in *Epode* 16 that the only escape seems to be into the realm of the unreal.

In *Epode* 1 Maecenas is off to a war which threatens Caesar (vv.3-4). Mention is not made of his enemies. The next five *Epodes* (*Epodes* 2-6) illustrate either a fundamental lack of understanding of the consequences of an action (*Epode* 2 where Alfius has no idea of the reality of country-life and *Epode* 3 where one man's garlic becomes everyone's poison), or they illustrate a basic animosity to fellow individuals as in *Epode* 4 where the critic and the object of criticism are equally guilty of intolerance or *Epode* 5 where Canidia's singleminded destruction of the boy presupposes complete self-centredness. All these characteristics make something like civil war into the reality described in *Epode* 7.

In *Epode* 7 Roman society is caught in a trap of civil war because of the curse of Romulus. In the same way the individual can be caught in traps from which no escape is possible.<sup>22</sup> The consequences for society suffering from such a trap are described in *Epode* 7. *Epode* 8 explores the consequences of being trapped in a specific situation in terms of its effect on the individual.<sup>23</sup> The speaker might describe the old hag in repulsive detail, but the speaker's fascination with those details is clear at the same time.<sup>24</sup> The epode seems to make its point by exploiting the type of

19 The direct link between *Epodes* 5 and 6 is the reference in *Epode* 6 to *inultus ut flebo puer?* (v.16). After the harrowing description of the helplessness of the boy in *Epode* 5, any reference to an unrevenged boy in a following *Epode* will function as a direct connection.

20 Cf. Watson (1983:156-158) who sees Horace's use of iambic in *Epode* 6 "as a weapon of retaliation."

21 As Nisbet (1984:7) says: "Horace uses a poet's imagination to express genuine historical attitudes."

22 "In the *Epodes*, sexual *impotentia* and civil war are related ..." (Oliensis 1991:127).

23 *Epode* 8 and *Epode* 12 opens with the same "crashing note of abuse cast in an interrogative statement" (Carrubba 1964:44). The same level of disgust also expressed as an interrogative statement intrudes *Epode* 7. The connection between the personal disgust expressed against a woman (*Epodes* 8 and 12) and the revolt expressed against the state in *Epode* 7 is subtly emphasized in this way.

24 Oliensis (1991:130) refers to "the intercontamination of sexual and political *impotentia*" in *Epodes* 16 and 17. *Epodes* 8 and 12 could be added to this list.

description normally associated with a love poem. Sexual references are explicit from the first. Only instead of beauty and sexual prowess this *Epode* concentrates on revolting physical appearance and near-impotence. In *Epode 5* a connection between Canidia and Rome has been suggested. The same connection could be suggested in *Epode 8* between the old hag and Rome.<sup>25</sup> Rome itself has become horribly repulsive but strangely fascinating to the poet of the epodes. The relationship between the poet and the hag in *Epode 8* implies that a parallel relationship could exist between the poet and his country or between an individual and society in the collection as a whole. In the epodes the poet is appalled by the society in which he finds himself, but in spite of his revulsion, he is still physically enthralled by it. By the end of the collection the two final epodes spell out his only options: he can withdraw to a world of his own making (in his imagination as described in *Epode 16*) or he has to admit that he is no longer free and has become a captive (as he does in *Epode 17*).

The resentment against circumstances (whether vis-à-vis the old hag or in relation to Rome) breaks through unexpectedly in *Epode 9*. It is interesting that Maecenas is the addressee in *Epode 9* as he was in *Epode 1*. But where *Epode 1* looked ahead to war, *Epode 9* looks to celebrate a victory.<sup>26</sup> Ironically however the best Caecuban wine is finally needed in *Epode 9* not to celebrate the victory described throughout the poem, but to banish fears arising from that very victory.<sup>27</sup>

Of course this rising unease (*fluentem nauseam*, v.35) adds a completely different perspective to the celebrations.<sup>28</sup> It was after all a victory over Rome's own citizens. The greater the victory the greater the loss, is the implication. Once again the

25 In *Epode 1* the *laborem* (9) involved, required *non molles viros* (10), while the complaint in *Epode 12* centred on the poet being *semper ad unum mollis opus* (15-16).

26 The entire poem seems to reflect the same kind of joyful thankfulness as found in *Ode 1.37* which celebrated Cleopatra's final defeat. In both poems there are clear indications however, that things are not as simple as they seem. Cf. Nisbet (1984:11-17) for a detailed analysis of this poem, arguing for Horace's presence at Actium.

27 Wagenvoort (1956:171) points out that "at one time it even looked as if Octavian might have borne the title "Romulus" instead of the honorary title of Augustus."

28 The debate on whether the *fluentem nauseam* is caused by sea-sickness or excessive drinking seems to me not to take the immediate textual implications sufficiently into consideration. If a "physical" argument must be pursued, someone suffering from either *mal de mer* or over-indulgence would hardly be likely to call for *capaciores...scyphos* (9.33) or specify the types of wine to receive diligent attention next. *Curam metumque* (9.37) especially in connection with Caesar's affairs remind the reader of the fear in *Epode 1* which Horace would have suffered on behalf of Maecenas going to the war (*comes minore sum futurus in metu*, 1.17). Checking *nauseam* with wine (vv.35-36) and checking anxiety and fear with the same wine (vv.37-38) juxtapose the *nauseam* and the anxiety and fear. A clear link is therefore established between the *nauseam* and the anxiety and fear, which suggests a mental nausea rather than a passing physical inconvenience. After the detailed objections to civil war in *Epode 7* (*quo scelesti ruitis?*, v.1; *furorne caecus an rapit vix acrior an culpa?* vv.13-14; *acerba fata Romanos agunt scelusque fraternae necis*, vv.17-18; *sacer nepotibus cruor*, v.20) any victory celebrated in *Epode 9* must be suspect.

ills of society take its toll from the individuals in that society. Horace's criticism of the Roman State is there for those who wish to see it.<sup>29</sup>

It is fitting then that this first cycle of 10 poems (all in iambic strophes) where Horace at times criticizes society quite explicitly, should conclude with the prayer for shipwreck described in the next poem, *Epode 10*. For in *Epode 10* Horace inverts the normal good wishes expressed in a propempticon. Instead of a *bon voyage* poem, the epode proclaims a curse on the ship and the scapegoat on the ship, one Mevius. The epode can be read as an elaborate *pars pro toto* where the ship represents society (or the state) and Mevius, whose presence is made known because of his repulsive odour (*olentem Mevium*, "stinking Mevius", v.2) and who functions as an example of the cancer destroying society. The prayer for a shipwreck instead of a safe journey is not the only inversion used by Horace to make his point in this poem namely that the Roman state is permeated by corruption to a point where the stink of it permeates all society. At the end of the epode the sacrifice to give thanks to the gods for a safe journey is horribly parodied when Mevius himself becomes the sacrificial meal enjoyed by the gulls (*porrecta mergos iuveris*, "stretched out [as a sacrifice] you give pleasure to the gulls", v.22) – an action which ironically gives thanks that some kind of end has finally been made to such a ship and such a passenger.

The criticism of both society and this example of an individual expressed in this epode, reflects the deep anxiety with which the poet looks on Rome. The implied parallel between Rome, the poet's own society and Troy in the crucial central section of the poem, suggests clearly that acts of impiety are punished. This society, like Troy will suffer the consequences of its deeds.

In spite of symbolically writing off the state in the prayer for a shipwreck in *Epode 10*, individual examples reflecting the cancer in society are further described in the next five *Epodes* as a type of *post factum* motivation for this shipwreck. The cycle comes to an end with *Epode 16* expressing a longing for final escape from the Roman situation by emigrating elsewhere in reality or more probably escape into the imagination. *Epode 17* represents the final unhappy surrender of the individual to the circumstances which he has tried, unsuccessfully, to keep at bay with his poetry.

After the shipwreck of *Epode 10* then, various individuals are shown as slaves to circumstances in *Epodes 11-15*. In *Epode 11* the protagonist is a slave in general to the vicious cycle of moving from one lover to another. He seems to be driven from one situation of shameful slavery to his feelings to the next, from one action of incompetence to the next. He is tossed around on the sea of love like a rudderless boat. Since this individual has no control of his circumstances he becomes a representative of any Roman citizen caught in the contemporary circumstances of civil war. The lover cannot escape the perpetual cycle of being a slave to love. The Roman citizen seems doomed to have one civil war end only when the next one begins. The voice of reason has as little effect on this lover and his love life as it has on the Roman citizen and the society in which he finds himself.

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29 Contra Nisbet (1984:18) who argues that Horace "ended the decade as committed supporter of the new regime".

*Epode* 12 is not only connected to *Epode* 8 but is also linked very closely to *Epode* 11. In *Epode* 12 the lover's physical reaction is directly linked to individual physical circumstances, just as his emotional reaction in *Epode* 11 was shown to be directly dependent on his love-interest of the moment. In *Epode* 12 the lover is described in terms of his dependence on his mistress. In neither of the two epodes (11 and 12) does it seem possible for the lover to escape from the vicious cycle in which he finds himself. In *Epode* 11 he remains mentally incapable of tearing himself loose from dependence on a series of lovers. In *Epode* 12 he remains physically incapable of bringing a sexual situation to a satisfactory close.<sup>30</sup> In both epodes the protagonist becomes the slave of circumstances, reminding any contemporary Roman reader of the inescapable consequences suffered both on an emotional and physical level because of political circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

*Epode* 13 gives a different perspective on basically the same situation as described by *Epodes* 11 and 12 (and 15) which only some outside force might or might not, change for the better (*deus haec fortasse benigna reducet in sedem vice*, "a god maybe, will amend the present with benign change", vv.7-8). In *Epode* 13 the physical situation which affects all concerned is a terrible storm. In the context of this collection of poems a ship no longer represents only a ship but has become a symbol for the Roman state. In *Epode* 13 the terrible storm too, the *horrida tempestas* (v.1) is no longer an ordinary storm, but a period of profound and threatening crisis. Since complaining about the weather is one of the most futile of human activities, the poet's advice to his companions is to take control of that which is within their power, namely to lighten their immediate anxieties with wine and music (*omne malum vino cantuque levato*, v.17). They have no power whatsoever over either the storm or the political crisis threatening them. They do have the power to combat either the physical or the emotional threat by reducing the tension associated with such a threat with wine and song. That this poem is not meant as a simple illustration of mind over matter is especially clear in the Homeric simile at the end of the poem. Chiron the Centaur teaches even such an individual as Achilles who knows that it is his fate not to return from Troy how to lighten his burden. If one, who had no hope that chance might change his circumstances, could find relief in wine and music, Horace and his companions should do the same. They at least still have a chance to survive the storm. Even on the larger political stage of life things may yet turn out less disastrously than expected for individuals and society as a whole. Horace's comfort at the end of the poem therefore lies not in advice to drown one's sorrows in wine and song. Nor does he advocate stoic self-control (*mens composita*) that accepts the inevitable. Horace's advice is much more realistic. Unlike Achilles Horace and his companions do *not* know what the future may bring. The present may be life threatening but at least the future remains open. Disaster, even imminent disaster, is

30 Oliensis (1991:130) links Horace's being too "soft" (*mollis*, 12.16) for the woman's needs in *Epode* 12 to his *mollis inertia* (14.1) which impedes the completion of his iambs. This repetition of *mollis* of course reminds the reader of *Epode* 1 where the war effort is to be undertaken by *non molles viros* (*Epode* 1.10).

31 It is also clear that *Epodes* 8 and 12 must be closely linked because of the shared subject matter, their savage general tone as well as the abusive questions introducing the two poems.

not certain and until it is, kindly change (*benigna...vice*, vv.7-8) may still step in. In the meantime even though the present situation cannot be changed, at least the anxiety associated with the situation can be reduced.

Of course the poem also reflects the basic pessimism of the entire collection. The poet by implication mocks the ignorance of human beings who do not know the future. He mocks the fact that ignorance can be bliss in the human situation as opposed to Achilles who knows he does not have any hope for a good outcome in future. In the final analysis ordinary individuals have no power over the future. They can only cope with that which inevitably happens to them. They are placed in a larger framework of things, where the helplessness that they experience reflect the basic unpredictability of life.

Helplessness and lack of power feature prominently in *Epode* 14 which like those epodes with a specifically erotic theme (*Epodes* 8, 11, 12 and 15) makes its point quite explicitly. In this epode the lover bewails the faithlessness of the beloved (*me libertina, nec uno contenta, Phryne macerat*, “Phryne, a ‘liberated’ woman chews me up, not satisfied with one lover”, 14.15-16) and his own inability to rectify matters. The connection between the poet's inability (*mollis inertia*, 14.1) to get up to work (write his iambics, 14.7-8) and his preoccupation with love which liquifies or overwhelms him (*macerat*, 14.16) is clear.

The poet is not the only one whose promises remain unfulfilled. In *Epode* 15 the oath of fidelity sworn by the beloved is described in great detail and against a cosmic background. The majesty of Jupiter, guarantor of oaths as well as the powers of the night is implicitly evoked in the first four lines of the poem. The oath itself is given in terms of laws governing the natural world by referring to the enmity between wolf and flock (*dum pecori lupus...infestus*, “while the wolf is an enemy to the flock”, v.7). The oath is given in terms of laws concerning the cosmic world where Orion threatens sailors (*nautis infestus Orion*, v.7) with a stormy end in winter and is finally given in terms of the laws governing the world of myth where the hair of a calm Apollo is touched by a breeze (*intonsosque...Apollinis...capillos*, v.9). When the beloved breaks the oath of fidelity this action devastates not only the lover but also undermines the majesty and power of the gods. It is surprising then that the rest of the poem ignores the breaker of the oath completely, only to concentrate exclusively on the debilitating effect the breaking of the oath has on those to whom the oath was sworn in the first place. The effect is a bitter focus on the cycle of behaviour encapsulated in endlessly swearing and breaking a supposedly unbreakable oath. The reader only needs to think of the preceding and following *Epodes* to have a parallel situation clearly brought to mind. Horace the love-poet represents a kind of “microcosm of the individual” reflecting the impotence and despair that civil war has brought on the “macrocosm” of Roman society (Mankin 1995:235). Civil war too debilitates the strength of society to a point of disintegration. The oath of loyalty to the state on the part of the citizens and the reciprocal oath of protection for citizens on the part of the state are broken again and again in a vicious social cycle of killing and revenge. In *Epode* 14 the poet too is incapable of fulfilling his promise to finish his iambics (*deus me vetat inceptos, olim promissum carmen, iambos ad umbilicum*

*adducere*, “a god forbids me to conclude my iambics, the song promised long ago”, 14.6-8).

Horace himself draws a parallel between his activities as a lover and as a poet. Horace sees his position as a rejected and ineffectual lover *vis-à-vis* an arrogant mistress as a metaphor for his position as an individual in relationship with society who finds his passionate criticism ineffectual. In short *Epode* 14 anticipates *Epode* 15 where Horace gives up on Neaera as well as preparing the stage for *Epode* 16 where he gives up on saving Rome and *Epode* 17 where he gives up on himself and finally surrenders to Canidia.

No wonder then that the collection of *Epodes* closes with two deeply pessimistic poems. In *Epode* 16 Horace suggests that flight into a different world seems to be the only escape possible from the present cycle of violence. And finally in *Epode* 17, the Horace who at the end of *Epode* 6 swore that he would not remain unrevenged and ineffectual like a child (*inultus ut flebo puer?*, “Shall I cry like an ineffectual child?”, v.16). This Horace admits that which he once denied so vehemently (*ergo negatum vincor ut credam*, 17.27) namely that he is indeed unrevenged and feeble as a child, that Canidia is indeed the victor.<sup>32</sup>

This is a frightening final comment on the entire collection. The words left ringing in the ears of the hearers are Canidia’s final triumphant cry putting the poet down as the only one who tried to stand up to her: “I bewail the limit of my art – useless against you” (*plorem artis in te nil agentis exitus*, 17.81).<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion then: in the entire collection of epodes Horace concentrates on one single theme. He focuses on the relationship between individual and society. This *leitmotiv* points out repeatedly that the individual suffers from the curse which affects the entire society.<sup>34</sup> Rome may be triumphant, but the individual is destroyed. This theme (which Vergil works out in his *Aeneid*) Horace dwells on in his collection of iambics anticipating Tacitus’ bitter reaction to the debilitating price paid by the individual for society’s *Pax Romana*.

Strangely enough there is also a note of hope hidden in all this. Canidia may be the final speaker in this collection of *Epodes*. She may appear to be the triumphant conqueror of the poet who symbolises the individual in society *par excellence*. Canidia still speaks in the words provided by the poet himself, however.<sup>35</sup> The final word may be Canidia’s, but it is the poet’s report of those words that brings the collection to an end.<sup>36</sup> This may not count as a victory for the individual on the stage

32 The hardships undertaken in hope in *Epode* 1 (*an hunc laborem mente laturo*, v.9; *rogas, tuum labore quid iuvem meo*, v.15) have not concluded with the rest which normally follows hard work. There is not even respite in *Epode* 17 (*nullum ab labore me reclinat otium*, v.24).

33 The final irony of the collection is of course that the initial open-ended *ibis* (*Epode* 1.1) concludes with the doom of *exitus* (*Epode* 17.81).

34 An individual like Maecenas may be “going places” (*ibis*, 1.1) but Canidia pulls the strings (*plorem artis in te nil agentis exitus?*, 17.81).

35 Cf. Oliensis (1991:119): “This is, after all, Canidia’s last appearance in Horace’s poetry; it is her own *exitus* which she unwittingly announces.”

36 The hissing s-sounds in the last line of the collection *artis...agentis...exitus* (17.81) reverberate into the silence after the words have been spoken.

set by contemporary Roman power politics. A millennium or two down the line, however, the *poet's* and in the poet, the individual's creative and intellectual victory is established irrefutably.

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