Horace, Epistles 1, 19, 23–40

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To the memory of Colin Macleod

I. Introductory

libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps,
non aliena meo pressi pede. qui sibi fidet
dux reget examen.
                 Parios ego primus iambos
ostendi Latio, numeros animosque secutus
25   *Archilochi, non res et agentia verba Lycamben.*
ac ne me foliis ideo brevioribus ornes
quod timui mutare modos et carminis artem,
temperat Archilochi Musam pede mascula Sappho,
temperat Alcaeus, sed rebus et ordine dispar:
30   *nec socerum quaerit quem versibus oblinat atris,*
nec sponsae laqueum famoso carmine nectit.
hunc ego, non alio dictum prius ore, Latinus
vulgavi fidicen. iuvat immemorata ferentem
ingenuis oculisque legi manibusque teneri.
35   *scire velis mea cur ingratus opuscula lector*
laudet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus:
non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor
impensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis;
non ego, nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor,
40   *grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor.*

hinc illae lacrimae. 'spissis indigna theatris
scripta pudet recitare et nugis addere pondus'
si dixi, 'rides' ait 'et Iovis auribus ista
servas: fidis enim manare poetica mella
45   *te solum, tibi pulcher'.*

In a careful and learned discussion of Epistles 1, 19 which shed much light on the critical background and general argument of the poem, C. W. Macleod suggested the following paraphrase of the troublesome lines 23ff.: "I modelled myself on Archilochus – not his matter, but his spirit and metre; and if you are tempted to detract from my achievement because I did not change his metre

and technique (sc. in the *Epodes*): well, Sappho modifies Archilochus with her metre and so does Alcaeus, but *he* is also different in his matter and its disposition; and I brought him, Alcaeus, into Latin literature (sc. in the *Odes*)."[1]

Yet this interpretation is not without difficulty. First: if Horace passes from Epodes to Odes at line 28, as Macleod proposes, it means that he does not attempt at all to defend the relative unoriginality of the Epodes which he has admitted by the indicative *timui* (27)[2]. Second: why should Horace in lines 30–31 go out of his way to stress the absence of Lycambes-material (material associated with Archilochus' iambic poetry), if he has already passed to discussing the lyric Odes two lines earlier? Third: it is implied by the proposed emphasis on Alcaeus in line 29 that Sappho, in contrast to Alcaeus, used Archilochian material; but what can be the point of this contrast? Such difficulties perhaps justify yet another examination of these famous lines.

II. Structure

Most critics have assumed that the passage which begins at line 23 ends at line 34[3]; but if we consider the possibility that the passage continues to line 40, I believe we can discern a structure which in turn will help to clarify the argument. In my opinion lines 23–40 consist of two complementary 'panels', of which the first (23–31) deals with the Epodes and the second (32–40) with the Odes[4]. In each panel the argument unfolds in three stages, and each of the stages in one panel has a stage in the other to which it corresponds, the correspondences being underlined by verbal or motival repetitions. Thus:

23–31 *Epodes*

(a) 23–25 Qualified originality of the Epodes
(b) 26–27 Mixed reception of the Epodes owing to the areas in which they were unoriginal
(c) 28–31 Defence of the Epodes

1 Class. Quart. 27 (1977) 369, explaining the italicisation *'he'* thus (n. 52): '*Sed* contrasts Alcaeus with Sappho (not Horace)'. Colin Macleod gave me much encouragement during the writing of my paper, and both he and Ian DuQuesnay patiently commented on successive drafts of it. I am also glad to acknowledge the advice of Charles Brink and M. L. West.

2 Macleod (370) sees this as a typically Horatian ploy: 'at line 28 Horace deliberately shifts his ground, *recule pour mieux sauter*: he admits his relative unoriginality in the earlier book in order to stress his more thoroughgoing originality in the later one.'

3 So e.g. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (1957) 348; G. Stégen, *Les épîtres littéraires d'Horace* (1958) 178; M. J. McGann, *Studies in Horace's First Book of Epistles* (1969) 83; Macleod 372. Some editors actually begin a new paragraph at line 35.

4 These panels are 'framed' by two and a half lines of introduction (21–23a) and four and a half lines of conclusion (41–45a), the 'bee-references' of the former being picked up by those of the latter in ring-composition (see D. West, *Reading Horace* [1967] 49; McGann 84). I do not of course wish to imply that there are no other verbal correspondences in the poem, e.g. 11 *certare* ∼ 48 *certamen*.

32–40 *Odes*

(a) 32–33 Unqualified originality of the Odes (*hunc ego*,
$\overline{non\ alio\ dictum\ prius\ ore}$, *Latinus / uolgaui fidicen*
~ 23–24 *Parios ego primus iambos / ostendi Latio*)

(b) 33–36 Mixed reception of the Odes (*laudet ametque* ~ 26 *foliis ... ornes*;
ingratus ... premat ... iniquus ~ 26 *breuioribus*)

(c) 37–40 Defence of the Odes (*non ego ... non ego* ~ the anaphora at 28–29
temperat ... temperat)

The first panel on the Epodes, being much the more difficult of the two, requires consideration in some detail.

III. Lines 23–31 Epodes

In the first half of the poem (lines 1–20) Horace discussed *imitatio uitiorum*, with appropriate examples (11 *certare mero*, 12–13 *uoltu toruo ... exiguaeque togae* etc.). Such *imitatio* means that the imitator has been deceived, and Horace summarised the argument in line 17 thus: *decipit exemplar uitiis imitabile*. Horace then begins the second half of the poem by first claiming, not (as we might have expected) that he himself is an ideal imitator, but that he is an original poet (21–23); then, as the first panel opens, he explains with a further twist that his originality consisted in his being the first to imitate Archilochus (23–24). He also says (24–25) that there were two aspects to his imitation, one positive (*numeros animosque secutus Archilochi*) and the other negative (*non res et agentia uerba Lycamben*[5]). Now given the unmistakable tone of pride in 21–23, any suggestion in 24–25 that Horace was himself guilty of imitating *uitia* must be excluded: he can only be putting forward his own practice as an ideal. And given the lengthy criticism of *imitatio uitiorum* in 1–20, the reader is likely to assume that in 24–25 Horace is principally concerned with showing how he himself avoided this fault in the Epodes: we infer that Horace commends himself for the negative *non res et agentia uerba Lycamben* rather than for the positive *numeros animosque secutus*[6]. Such a commendation makes perfect sense

5 It is true that in the *Epodes* Horace did not reproduce the attack on Lycambes, but he did make use of Archilochian material. Thus, assuming that *non ... Lycamben* is an accurate account of his practice in the *Epodes,* the phrase cannot mean that Horace did not use Archilochian material; Horace can only be saying that he did not reproduce the famous quarrel. *res* must therefore be limited by *agentia uerba Lycamben,* and *et* is explanatory ('I did not follow his subject-matter, i.e. the famous attack on Lycambes'). For this use of *et* cf. Oxford Latin Dictionary s.v. 11. What Horace means by saying that he did not attack Lycambes is, presumably, that in the *Epodes* he did not hound any one individual – which is true.

6 I realise that the distinction between negative and positive is to some extent artificial since the absence of *imitatio uitiorum* will inevitably imply the presence of *imitatio uirtutum*. But I emphasise the distinction in order to illustrate the way Horace's argument modulates between lines 23 and 27.

since most ancient writers assumed that Archilochus' *animi,* the feature for which his poetry was above all remembered[7], depended precisely upon his attack on Lycambes[8]. Horace thus applies the lesson of lines 1–20 to his own imitation of Archilochus: as far as subject-matter is concerned, the latter's poetry lends itself to *imitatio uitiorum,* but he, Horace, has not been deceived. It is significant that, according to Quintilian (10, 1, 60), there were some people who believed Archilochus failed to reach the first rank as a poet on account of *materiae uitium.*

It transpires from lines 26–27, however, that Horace's potential critic is less concerned with the omission of *agentia uerba Lycamben* than with Horace's admission *quod timui mutare modos et carminis artem*[9], a clause which clearly refers to *numeros animosque secutus* at line 24 above. The substitution of *carminis artem* for *animos* indicates that the critic accepts the need for Archilochian *animi* in any recreation of Archilochus' poetry; the substitution also serves to highlight the repetition of *numeros* by *modos*: it is evidently Horace's retention of Archilochus' metres on which criticism is centred. Thus the positive information which Horace volunteered about his own imitation of Archilochus at line 24, and which in the light of lines 1–20 seemed perhaps gratuitous at the time, now turns out to be the key issue concerning the Epodes.

The drift of the argument is not, of course, as casual as it seems. We know that *animi Archilochi,* the distinctive feature of Archilochus' poetry, could not in Horace's opinion be reproduced unless one also reproduced Archilochus' metres: see Ars Poetica 79 *Archilochum* proprio *rabies armauit iambo,* 'madness armed Archilochus with *its own* iambic metre'[10]. *animi* and metre are thus inextricably linked[11]; and in lines 28–31 Horace defends his Epodes against the criticism of line 27 by choosing Sappho and Alcaeus to demonstrate what happens when would-be Archilochian poetry *is* deprived of its metre.

His argument is: "I reproduced the metre and spirit of Archilochus but not the attack on Lycambes; and if you complain because I failed to change the metre, look at the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus ⟨who did effect such a change[12]⟩: they produced only a diluted version (*temperat*) of Archilochus'

7 See e.g. H. D. Rankin, *Archilochus of Paros* (1977) ch. 1.

8 'Ancient poets and writers who had but slight acquaintance with Archilochus usually, when they mention him, harp on Lycambes' (Fraenkel 342 n. 1).

9 *Timere* is the opposite of *audere,* the technical verb for inventive or original writers; see the examples in Macleod 362 n. 14; 371 n. 63. Though the indicative ending *-ui* denotes an admission by Horace, the *tim-* 'root' is spoken, as it were, by his potential critic ('because I was "afraid" to change'). *timui* is thus not equivalent to *nolui,* as some editors maintain.

10 This interpretation of *proprio* is rightly advocated by Brink, *Horace on Poetry. The 'Ars poetica'* (Cambridge 1971) ad loc. Brink there also observes that the origins of iambic poetry were disputed; it is thus realistic of Horace to represent his potential critic as holding a different opinion from himself.

11 So too Macleod (371), quoting *Ars Poet.* 79.

12 Like Macleod (368) and Fraenkel (343–345), I understand *suo* with *pede.*

poetry ⟨and thus failed to reproduce his spirit⟩, though on the credit side (*sed*) they too avoided the attack on Lycambes [i.e. his *materiae uitium*]."[13]

Horace thus draws the lesson, superficially paradoxical, that his metrical 'timidity' produced more daring poetry (i.e. truer to the spirit of Archilochus) whereas the metrical originality of Sappho and Alcaeus had the opposite effect[14].

The choice of Sappho and Alcaeus as examples of diluted Archilochian verse is curious; but given Archilochus' reputation as a vituperative poet, Horace has presumably chosen them because they too were known as vituperative poets. Alcaeus' reputation for vituperation hardly requires extended illustration here[15]; he is praised by Quintilian for attacking tyrants (10, 1, 63 *tyrannos insectatus*). On the other hand, Alcaeus seems not to have been known for writing iambic poetry. The case of Sappho is less straightforward. Although we know that the 'principal themes' of her poetry were 'her loves and hatreds'[16], do the latter mean that she too was regarded as a poet of vituperation? As it happens, we are given some relevant information about her reputation from secondary sources. According to the Suda (s.v. Σαπφώ) she wrote ἰάμβους, a statement which is clarified by two other authors. We are told by Philodemus that Σαπφώ τινα ἰαμβικῶς ποιεῖ καὶ Ἀρχίλοχος οὐκ ἰαμβικῶς, where it seems clear from the context that ἰαμβικῶς means 'in the manner of an iambist' rather than 'in iambic metre'[17]. On the other hand Julian talks of ἰάμβους οὐ μάχην ἀείδοντας τὴν Βουπάλειον κατὰ τὸν Κυρηναῖον ποιητήν, ἀλλ' οἵους ἡ καλὴ Σαπφὼ βούλεται τοῖς ὕμνοις [*v.l.* νόμοις] ἁρμόττειν[18], from which it appears

13 *Rebus dispar* in 29 is explained by *nec socerum ... carmine nectit* in 30–31 in exactly the same way as *res* is explained by *agentia uerba Lycamben* in 25 (see above, n. 5). I have therefore printed a colon at the end of line 29 (though an alternative method would be to bracket lines 30–31 and not punctuate after 29 at all). It is difficult to know what might be meant by crediting Alcaeus with the failure to attack Lycambes since Alcaeus, unlike Horace himself (above, n. 5), *did* hound one particular individual, viz. Pittacus. Perhaps Horace thinks that Alcaeus' attack on a political figure was justified whereas Archilochus' attack on a private individual was not. Alternatively, Horace may mean precisely what he says: Alcaeus' poetry, unlike that of Archilochus, did not force anyone to commit suicide. The latter possibility would certainly explain why lines 30–31 are so specific, but it would also mean that Horace is using language to disguise the fact that Alcaeus and Archilochus are not essentially *rebus dispares* at all. Yet such sophistry would not be un-Horatian.

14 *Temperare* is commonly used of watering down wine (Ernout-Meillet, *Dict. Etym. Lat.*, s.v.; Nisbet-Hubbard on *Odes* 1, 20, 11). Colin Macleod pointed out to me that Horace is perhaps suggesting that Sappho and Alcaeus are *aquae potores* and that Archilochus is thus like Cratinus who at the start of the poem is contrasted with water-drinkers. For Archilochus as a wine-drinker cf. Macleod 372 nn. 69 and 71.

15 See further D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (1955) 149ff.

16 Ibid. 133.

17 *De Poem.* 2, 29 p. 252 Hausrath = 2, 20 in F. Sbordone, *Ricerche sui papiri ercolanesi* 2 (1976) 154–155.

18 *Epist.* 30 Bidez-Cumont (403d).

that Sappho's iambics were not in any sense vituperative. Putting these pieces of evidence together, we may infer that Sappho, like Alcaeus, was known for writing vituperative poetry but that such poetry was not written in iambic metre. This is exactly the point which, it seems to me, Horace makes in lines 28–31. Sappho and Alcaeus failed to reach their full potential in vituperative or Archilochian poetry, not because they failed to employ the attack on Lycambes (a failure which Horace counted as a gain), but because they failed to use the Archilochian metres which he, Horace, was later to use in his Epodes.

Although Sappho and Alcaeus are used to defend Horace's practice in the Epodes, the very introduction of their names prepares us for the switch to the Odes at line 32, where Alcaeus is represented as a lyricist tout court[19]. Indeed the very reason why Horace has spent so much time on the Epodes, poems whose originality 'cannot have been a live issue' at the time the Epistle was written[20], is that his argument there is also relevant to the Odes. As we know from the Odes themselves, Horace believed that his claim to immortality rested on his lyric poetry; he believed that in the Odes he had produced a set of completely original poems and that their originality consisted principally in his successful reproduction of the metres of Sappho and Alcaeus[21]. Yet if the Epodes could be criticised on the grounds that Horace had reproduced the metres of Archilochus, so too the Odes could be criticised on analogous grounds; ironically, therefore, Horace was liable to be criticised for what in his opinion was his supreme achievement as a poet. It was to forestall such criticism that he devoted the first of his two 'panels' to the Epodes. What apparently began as a demonstration of the avoidance of *imitatio uitiorum* ends as an illustration of the essential connection between metre and the spirit of a given genre.

19 *Hunc* at 32 is thus not an example of 'awkward abruptness' (Macleod 369) but of Horace's characteristic sleight of hand: 'Talking of Alcaeus, it was he whom I introduced to Latin *lyric* poetry'. This apparently casual technique is exactly that used to introduce the discussion of metre above. Macleod himself in fact says that 'the *point* of mentioning [Sappho and Alcaeus] is to lead up to *hunc ego* etc.' (369 n. 53), though I am not sure I would go so far as this myself.
20 McGann 83.
21 See *Odes* 3, 30, esp. lines 13–14, and my remarks in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry* (ed. Tony Woodman and David West, 1974) 126 and nn. 50. 51.

IV. Lines 32–40 Odes

Having already put forward the metrical argument with reference to his lesser iambic poetry in the first panel, Horace in the second panel is able to present his more important lyric poetry in suitably unqualified terms (32–33). His choice of the word *ingratus* (35) suggests that a poet of such originality as himself (*immemorata ferentem,* 33) is entitled to an appreciative reception and that any criticism which may be forthcoming will be groundless. When pressed on this point (35–36), Horace characteristically defends himself by pleading literary elitism (*non ego ... non ego ...,* 37–40), thereby engagingly laying claim to yet another virtue of Callimachean poetics.