

A new look at *Epodes* 8 and 12: *Horatian* iambics and poetic consciousness  
Erika E. Zimmermann-Damer (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

In his *Epistles*, Horace claims of his iambic poetry that he inherited the meter and genre of invective from Archilochus but that he did not imitate the content, including Archilochus' harsh sexual invectives said to have driven the daughters of Lycambes to suicide (*Ep.* 1.19.23-31). Yet in *Epodes* 8 and 12, Horace does write sexual invective against women. *Epodes* 8 and 12 offer similar narratives and employ similar poetic devices. The speaker finds himself propositioned by an aggressive and unattractive woman, whom he rejects only after cataloguing, in vivid detail, the ways she disgusts him. Each poem incorporates bestial imagery for the female body, each turns self-ironic humor against phallic language for the male body, and each mingles high and low vocabulary.

The sexually-explicit, misogynistic invectives directed against the women of *Epodes* 8 and 12 feature graphic obscenities for the human body (Richlin 1992, Henderson 1999), but most scholarly interpretations have taken these poems as metaphors for poetic styles or political anxieties (Clayman 1975, Fitzgerald 1988, Oliensis 1998). These approaches, however, ignore the physical details of the descriptions and move into allegorical interpretations of the female body. This paper will address the obscenity and physicality of the poems as examples of Horatian *aischrologia* to argue that the bodies in the poems represent more than fleshy invective targets.

I propose to look at Horace's display of the female body in *Epodes* 8 and 12 as poetically conscious evocations of the genealogy of iambic poetry. The genre of iambic invective gets its name from the figure of Iambe, a woman who made the mourning Demeter laugh according to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (*h. Cer.* 202-205). In a second tradition, Baubo made Demeter laugh by lifting her skirt and revealing herself when her words failed to cheer Demeter (Clement *Protr.* 2.20.2 – 21.2, Arnobius, *Adv. Nat.* 5.25). Baubo's gesture and Iambe's jesting have structurally similar positions in the story of Demeter's laughter: in each instance, through obscene speech or gesture, a woman transgresses the normal boundaries of female sexual modesty to reveal what is normally hidden (O'Higgins 2001: 144). These episodes offer the *aition* for *aischrologia*, or sexually explicit jesting, ritual obscenity, and insult, which featured in many women's festivals in Greece.

As Horace entered into the genre of iambic poetry, I argue that he incorporated his awareness of the aetiology of the genre into his own poetics. *Epodes* 8 and 12 reveal the female body in a more graphic, sexually explicit manner than occurred in previous Roman literature. The extensive catalogues of the disgusting female body are an appropriation of iambic's origins in sexually explicit speech and display of women's sexuality translated to suit the generic parameters of Roman invective, as Horace inherited it from authors such as Lucilius and Catullus. This explanation of poetic consciousness keeps a close focus on the extreme physical detail of these poems, and it is also consistent with Horace's frequent displays of knowledge about the origin of the genres he re-invents in Latin.