

Horace's Iambic Prometheus: *Odes* 1.16, 2.13, and *Epodes* 17

*Odes* 1.16 and 2.13 both contain links to Horace's earlier iambic poetry. In 1.16 Horace speaks about it directly (*crimiosis ... iambis*, 2-3; *celeris iambos*, 24), asking a girl whom he has offended to give up the anger his poems have caused and renew their relationship; in addition, the ode contains "echoes of both words and ideas" from *Epodes* 5 and 17 (Hahn [1939] 222-3; cf. Johnson [2012] 220). In 2.13 scholars have observed echoes of *Epodes* 10 and 3, as well as a general tone of iambic invective, in the first half of the poem as Horace inveighs against the planter of the tree which nearly killed him (Nisbet and Hubbard [1978] 202, 208; Davis [1991] 82-3; Commager [1962] 140; Syndikus [2001] 414).

It is striking that these odes with iambic antecedents also contain unusual references to Prometheus. In 1.16.13-16, the central stanza of the ode, Horace relates how Prometheus, as he was creating humans with animal parts, also created the human capacity for extreme anger by putting "the violence of a mad lion" (*insani leonis vim*, 15-16) into the human stomach, the source of ill-temper; scholars have noted that this myth is possibly Horace's invention (Williams [1980] 2, Syndikus [2001] 182-3, Mayer [2012] 145-6). Similarly, in 2.13 Horace puts Prometheus' punishment not in the Caucasus (e.g., Verg. *Ecl.* 6.42; Prop. 2.1.69) but in the underworld, a version of the myth unprecedented in Latin literature.

I argue that Prometheus and iambic poetry are linked in these two poems: in 1.16 and 2.13, Prometheus is a figure for the iambic poet. In particular, I make the case that the representation of Prometheus in *Odes* 2.13 alludes to his representation in *Epode* 17 in order to contrast the effects of iambic poetry and lyric poetry.

In 1.16 Prometheus is both the analogue for the iambic poet and his creator. Just as Horace, with iambic poems, provoked anger in the girl to whom the ode is addressed,

Prometheus created anger in all humankind. Horace is also inevitably a victim of Prometheus' act of creation: it was mad rage (22-25) that drove him to write the iambics that angered the girl in the first place.

In 2.13 Prometheus, paired with Tantalus (*et Prometheus et Pelopis parens*, 37), seems at first to be a random and extremely odd addition to the slate of underworld denizens Horace nearly joined. In fact this is not the first time Horace has put him in the underworld and paired him with Tantalus. In *Epode* 17.65-9 the witch Canidia, believing that Horace's angry insults deserve a penalty worse than a swift death, threatens to make Horace's life a "hell" like that of the eternally-tormented Tantalus, Prometheus, and Sisyphus. In *Odes* 2.13, Horace also envisions a hell for himself; however, here Prometheus and Tantalus get respite from torment. In *Epode* 17, they "desire rest" (*optat quietem*, 65), and in *Odes* 2.13 they are "tricked into forgetting their labor" (*laborem decipitur*, 38; cf. *laboribus*, *Epod.* 17.64). However, their rest is not the "quiet" implied by *quietem*; rather, it comes through a "sweet sound" (*dulci sono*, 38). Prometheus and Tantalus are soothed not in silence but by the sound of Sappho's and Alcaeus' lyric melodies. Likewise the speaker of the iambic opening of the ode has abandoned his angry curses and invective at the end of the poem. Horace is showing that what gives relief to the angry iambic poet is to turn to lyric (cf. Davis [1991] 82-88). In 1.16, it is not the poet himself who is soothed by lyric verse; rather, the erstwhile iambist wishes to use his lyric ode to soothe the angered girl who reads his poetry. Both odes use Prometheus as a figure of the iambic poet, and both poems are about the power of lyric to soothe the anger associated with iambic invective.

### Bibliography

Commager, S. 1962. *The Odes of Horace*. New Haven.

- Davis, G. 1991. *Polyhymnia. The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse*. Berkeley.
- Hahn, E. A. 1939. "Epodes 5 and 17, *Carmina* 1.16 and 1.17." *TAPA* 70:213-230.
- Johnson, T. S. 2012. *Horace's Iambic Criticism*. Leiden.
- Mayer, R. 2012. *Horace, Odes Book I*. Cambridge.
- Nisbet, R. and M. Hubbard. 1978. *A Commentary on Horace, Odes Book II*. Oxford.
- Syndikus, H. P. 2001. *Die Lyrik des Horaz. Eine Interpretation der Oden*. 2nd edition. 2 vols.  
Darmstadt.
- Williams, G. W. 1980. *Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry*. New Haven/London.