

Impurity and Danger: Civil War Pollution in the *Epodes* and *Odes* of Horace

In Horatian scholarship, the continuity and development in attitudes towards the civil war in the *Epodes* and the *Odes* has been noticed by scholars but never fully explored (Grimal 1975, Wallace-Hadrill 1982; more recently Nasta 2001). The most prominent trends that develop throughout these works are the shifting of the cause of the civil war from the ancestral guilt originating with Romulus' murder of Remus to the overall degradation of morals, and the fashioning of Augustus as the potential, and eventually real, expiator of the civil war pollution and restorer of order.

In this paper, I will examine the progression of Horace's expressions of anxiety about pollution incurred from the civil war and the possibility of its expiation in the *Epodes* and the *Odes*. It is my contention that this anxiety and pessimism found in *Epodes*, written in the volatile Triumviral period, gradually begins to incorporate a more optimistic vision during the still unstable early Principate (*Odes* 1-3). Furthermore, by the time Horace is writing *Odes* 4 the political situation becomes more stable and the anxiety about civil war pollution is supplanted by a vision of complete expiation by Augustus. I will discuss Horace's use of the vocabulary of purity and pollution in the light of Lennon's recent work on pollution in ancient Rome (Lennon 2014) and Bowditch's study of Horace's poems as propitiatory offerings and his use of the discourse of Greek tragedy and ritual language (Bowdich 2001).

Horace's discussion of civil war pollution begins with *Epodes* 7 and 16. In these poems we can see a focus on the *scelus fraternalis necis* (*Ep.* 7.18), which raises the question of Romulus' murder of Remus and the responsibility of ancestral guilt for the civil war. This causation is framed by the vocabulary of disease and criminal activity, which is related to blood

pollution. Furthermore, he explains the cause of the civil war through a combination of Roman religious experience and motifs from Greek tragedy, tracing the origin of the conflict down to Romulus. As we move into the *Odes*, already in *Od.* 1.2 we can see that, as Horace wonders who might be assigned to the role of expiating the severe transgressions of the civil war (29-30: *cui dabit partis scelus expiandi / Iuppiter?*), the answer is ultimately Augustus in the form of a divine expiator. Augustus' task is twofold: to direct Roman violence away from home towards an external enemy, and to remove the stain of the civil war from the people through moral reforms. The latter task is important, as it shows that Horace is moving away from his initial interpretation of the civil wars as stemming from fratricide towards the idea that overall moral decay is to blame. The fact that Augustus identified himself with Romulus must inevitably come into conflict with the fratricidal interpretation found in the *Epodes*. Because of this identification, in the *Odes* there is a movement towards a new understanding of the cause of the civil war.

The Roman *Odes* provide the most extensive treatment of the causes of the civil war and expand on many motifs seen so far. The last Roman Ode, which may have been written after Actium, shows pessimism reminiscent of the *Epodes*, while *Od.* 3.3 and 3.4 go so far as to explain the causes of the war as the product of moral decay. In these poems it is argued that not only the civil war, but also the Trojan war was caused through corruption and disrespect for the gods. Finally, in *Odes* 4, we find a new, purified vision of the empire. Every household is now free from pollution (4.5.21: *nullis polluitur casta domus stupris*), which may serve as a response to the previously addressed anxiety about the future degradation of the Roman people. *Od.* 4.15 presents a fitting conclusion to the question of civil war pollution Horace raised back in the *Epodes*. The madness that permeated the civil war, caused by pollution generated from moral degradation, is now far away from Rome. As I hope to show, the vocabulary of pollution and

purity is used consistently Horace's poetry, showing a trajectory from pessimism to optimism about the stability of Augustus' rule and the validity of his settlement.

Bibliography

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