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Iambic Metapoetics in Horace, *Epodes* 8 and 12

ERIKA ZIMMERMANN DAMER

When in Book 1 of his *Epistles* Horace reflects back upon the beginning of his career in lyric poetry, he celebrates his adaptation of Archilochean *iambos* to the Latin language. He further states that while he followed the meter and spirit of Archilochus, his own *iambi* did not follow the matter and attacking words that drove the daughters of Lycambes to commit suicide (*Epist.* 1.19.23–5, 31).¹ The paired erotic invectives, *Epodes* 8 and 12, however, thematize the poet's sexual impotence and his disgust during encounters with a repulsive sexual partner. The tone of these *Epodes* is unmistakably that of harsh invective, and the virulent targeting of the *mulieres'* revolting bodies is precisely in line with an Archilochean poetics that uses sexually-explicit, graphic obscenities as well as animal comparisons for the sake of a poetic attack. *Epodes* 8 and 12 may, in fact, offer Roman culture's most overtly misogynistic tone.²

In spite of the vehemence in the speaker's verbal assaults, he is reacting to his own perceived sexual weakness. In fact, Horatian iambic continually notes the unmartial status and weakness of the speaker's body. He is programmatically *imbellis ac firmus parum* (*Epod.* 1.16) and his final appearance is that of an enervated old man: he is jaundiced, breathless, feverish, and aged on account of Canidia's powers (*Epod.* 17.21–6, 31–4).³ Accordingly, I posit here that bodily invective in *Epodes* 8 and 12 functions metapoetically. I call attention to the repetition of stylistic terms—*mollitia*, *inertia*, and *rabies*—within *Epodes* 8 and 12, and show how these two poems can be seen as part of Horace's ongoing project to distinguish his own emerging iambic project from the incipient genre of Roman love elegy.⁴ To these two elegiac terms, *mollitia* and *inertia*, the Horatian iambic speaker adds the quintessentially iambic *rabies*, a term that the poet Horace himself will later call the emotion that first generated iambic poetry.

My reading thus suggests that Horace was well aware not only of the tropes and *topoi* of Roman love elegy,⁵ but also of its vocabulary of style that routinely associates the human bodies of its characters with the central stylistic qualities of the poetic genre. While critics have disputed the chronology,⁶ most agree that Horace's *Epodes* were published soon

after Actium, in approximately 31/30 BCE, and were followed by the publication of Propertius's *Monobiblos* and Tibullus's Book 1 in 28 and 27 BCE, respectively.⁷ We thus have evidence in the intergeneric dialogue that I draw out of *Epodes* 8 and 12 for the existence of two-way influence between the poets of Roman iambic and elegiac erotic poetry, what Peter Heslin (2011, 60) has aptly called "an extended process in which each poet defined himself against the other[s]." Furthermore, Horace's poems articulate an iambic refusal to valorize these terms that generally characterized effeminacy or other failings of normative Roman masculinity in broader Roman discourses of gender and sexuality. *Iambos*, despite its transgressively obscene content, thus serves to uphold and reinforce the status quo in a period where elite Roman masculinity was challenged through social forces, upset by the political instability of the Triumviral period, and was witness to the emergence of alternative masculinities in the sartorial self-expression of Roman elites like Caesar and Maecenas and in the poetic aesthetics of Roman love elegy.⁸

For many decades, *Epodes* 8 and 12 were considered so obscene that they were censored from publication and ignored by critics of Horatian iambic.⁹ By the late 1980s, however, these *Epodes* began to be re-evaluated as an integral part of Horace's first lyric collection.¹⁰ William Fitzgerald's groundbreaking study (1988) argued for the interrelation between the political, invective, and erotic poems of the *Epodes*, and has laid the foundation for much later criticism focused on the sociopolitical context of the *Epodes'* production and on Roman sexuality.¹¹ The *Epodes* demonstrate a disconnection between the Archilochean iambic pose of "masculinity and sexual potency adapted by the persona" and the persistent concern with impotence and helplessness visible in the poems (1988, 186). While *Epode* 8 reveals a discomfort about the masculinity displayed in "iambic *vis*," *Epode* 12 makes the persona's sexual inadequacy a metaphor for the inadequacy the poet feels in his political context (1988, 185–91).

Ellen Oliensis (1991, 1998) unifies Fitzgerald's emphases upon the political and the social when she argues that *impotentia*, both political and sexual, is a pervasive theme in the *Epodes*. For Oliensis, the sexual *impotentia* of the erotic poems is a twin to the *impotentia* the poet-speaker displays to Maecenas in the political *Epodes* about civil war; overall, the *Epodes* demonstrate that the "same virile goods are at stake in games of social and sexual intercourse" (1998, 77) and that Horace continually fails to measure up against Canidia, Maecenas, and the women of *Epodes* 8 and 12 (1998, 71–90).

Tim Johnson's important work (2012), the first full-length monograph on the *Epodes* to appear in English since 1969, has returned to the central question of iambic strength and weakness in these *Epodes* and offers a new perspective on the sociopolitical impact Horatian iambic poetry may have had. Though *Epodes* 8 and 12 show the dangerous potential of unchecked Archilochean rage, Johnson argues that the Horatian iambic speaker demonstrates his strength, not his weakness, in these poems, by "putting doubts about his iambic power into the mouths of others and defends himself by placing the charges that he is weak within the context of his most potent attacks" (2012, 41).¹² Thus the destructive iambic rage on display in *Epodes* 8 and 12 yields elsewhere to a new Horatian practice of polyphonic modality, in which competing voices come together in a new Horatian iambic practice that may help reconstruct, rather than divide, Roman society after the civil wars.¹³

John Henderson's readings (1999, 2009) refocus the discussion on the embodied invective within these poems. Where Fitzgerald's reading ignored too much of the corporeal and misogynistic texture of *Epodes* 8 and 12, Henderson's reading exposes *Epode* 8 as a transgressive text, a "performative act of victimization" that makes all its readers behave as victimizer and victim of verbal, sexual, and textual abuse (1999, 96). The woman's body and its textual representation threaten to overwhelm the structures (be they literary, those of Roman culture, or the textual boundary between reader and character) which uphold the separation of identities. The woman's textual/sexual body confirms for the reader the exclusion of the female upon which masculine identity is based, and the poem attempts to create a community of masculinity based on that fundamental exclusion. Yet the female sexualized body and the virulent representation of the lower bodily stratum, the Latin *pus atque venenum*, are much more potent than the enfeebled masculinity of the epodic Horace, *Flaccus*, who strives through iambic invective to conquer it (Henderson 1999, 101–7). *Epode* 12, in turn, with its dialogue between sexual partners, further implicates us, as readers, in the performative erotic act of insult (Henderson 2009). The iambic poet thus engages us in verbal staining and staining-reading of the characters' act of "mutual sexual response" or an erotic exchange about "talk rough-and-dirty" (2009, 416–7).¹⁴

Against the backdrop of these sociopolitical interpretations, a more purely metapoetic approach has emerged that places the *Epodes* within their contemporary literary context. Stephen Harrison's continuing attention to generic interactions (2007, 2013) highlights the ways Roman

poets thematize generic issues in their texts and how these generic interfaces themselves become the subject of poetic discourse (2013, 10; cf. Cairns 1972, 158–76). Harrison offers a metapoetic reading of the second half of the *Epodes* keen to the tension between iambic vigor and soft erotic elegy. His analysis can at least partially explain the appeal of the unorthodox soft elegiac poet-speaker as a model for masculinity in the *Epodes* by pointing to the shifts in the sociocultural framework of the Horatian poetic speaker, where the Archilochean equality of a circle of aristocratic friends is “replaced by the more uneven relationships of patronage and subordination [in Roman society]” (Harrison 2007, 114). Although metapoetic work on the *Epodes* has not focused upon the erotic invective *Epodes*, the important insights of Georg Luck, Alessandro Barchiesi, Harrison, and Heslin demonstrate interactions between early Propertian elegy and Horatian iambic, and point to Horace’s pervasive use of tropes and *topoi* found in Roman love elegy which I will extend here.¹⁵ My own work extends these insights about generic interaction into our readings of *Epodes* 8 and 12 to articulate more clearly *how* Horace engages with Roman love elegy as a rejected model for masculinity.¹⁶ Where elegy reclaims and valorizes terms such as *mollitia* and *inertia* as positive aesthetic and political choices, iambic upholds the Roman status quo by rejecting such qualities when applied to the human body as markers of effeminacy.

Prior critics of the erotic *Epodes* engaged the themes of corporeality and *impotentia* to produce significant political, social, and metapoetic interpretations, and to reinstate these *Epodes* within Horace’s broader iambic project. With the exception of Henderson’s interpretations, however, they have emphasized the social and political consequences of *Epodes* 8 and 12 over a close reading of their obscenity. Yet just such a close reading demonstrates how Horatian sexual invective participates in Roman discourses of sexuality and of contemporary literary style and poetics. In the following discussions of the individual poems, I first expose how bodily invective mocks the women he rejects, as well as the speaker; I then turn to the metapoetic qualities of the poems. My interpretations strive to bridge the sociopolitical and metapoetic critical strands. A close reading of the obscenity of *Epodes* 8 and 12 will demonstrate that the very terms that describe the speaker’s and the women’s sexual failures are open to a metapoetic reading as instances of “generic interaction” with Roman love elegy and Horatian iambic criticism. The human bodies in these sexually obscene poems have profound literary valence that Horace uses to negotiate the difference of his erotic poetry

from his contemporary Roman erotic poets. This metapoetic concern with iambic obscenity, traced in the bodies of the characters targeted, links early Horatian lyric to his later lyrics on aging women lovers (e.g. *Carm.* 1.25, 3.15, 4.13), and shows an early glimpse of Horace's later concern with generic origins in *Epistles* 1.19 and the *Ars poetica*.

Epode 8: Ironic Attraction, Iambic Disgust, and Impotentia

Epode 8 provokes because its virulent invective and coarse vocabulary contrast with its profound literary polish. On first reading, this poem's invective places it squarely in the Archilochean tradition of sexual invective targeting a rejected woman. I open this poem up to a second metapoetic reading, however, one that recognizes the irony in the speaker's claim to have an illiterate phallus (*illiterati nervi*, 17–8; Adams 1982, 38). Throughout this poem, bodily invective sits alongside diminutives, neologism, a virtuoso display of words for the male member, and a conspicuous display of material wealth and social status. The particular vocabulary of this bodily invective, which marks the *mulier's* belly as soft (*mollis venter*) and displays the softness of the speaker's sexual impotence, furthermore, has a metapoetic significance that shows the interaction between Roman love elegy and Horace's Roman iambics, an influence that will become more apparent in *Epode 12*.¹⁷

Epode 8 reports the speaker's rejection of an old woman who has failed to arouse him, and explains the speaker's initial impotence (*viris quid enervet meas*, 2)¹⁸ as caused by his full-blown disgust at the woman's aged body.¹⁹ As seen in *Epode 12* as well, this poem plays on typical stereotypes of old women in Greek and Roman literature. She is sexually aggressive, and the physical details of her exaggerated old age and decrepitude are catalogued.²⁰ Through its extensive use of agricultural and animal metaphors in lines 4–9 (*exarare, bovis, equina ubera*), this poem introduces the theme of bestial comparison that will characterize Horatian invective against old women as he modifies the archaic Greek tradition.²¹ As Victor Grassmann (1966, 88–9) notes, the diction here combines high poetic expressions with unpoetic vocabulary, incorporating language from the street and the barnyard.

The poem concentrates on a piece-by-piece graphic physical description and describes the speaker's paradoxical attraction to the disgusting body of the old woman. Henderson's probing examinations and provocative translations (1999, 2009) and the recent comprehensive close reading of Christoph Schubert (2012, 37–43) allow me to be brief. The view

moves from head to ankles, and is perhaps best understood as a parody of love poetry's typical descriptions of the beloved's beauty (Watson 2003, 292). It is here that the connection to Roman erotic elegy begins to emerge.²² The *Vetula* has a single blackened tooth and a deeply wrinkled face (3–4),²³ her breasts sag, her stomach is squishy, she has skinny thighs on swollen calves (7–10), and even her shriveled buttocks are lambasted (5–6). These features are all signs of age, but more significantly, physical traits like these are to be avoided by the later elegiac *puella* (Propertius 2.15.21–2, 3.25.12; Ovid, *Am.* 1.5.17–8, 21, 22; 2.14.7), where wrinkles on the face, stretch marks on a belly, or the sagging breasts of a mother are singled out as ones that the elegiac lover claims turn him off (James 2003, 173–5). As the elegiac lovers' disgust suggests he should do, the Horatian speaker rejects this woman, despite her wealth, style, family, and education (11–20), because of her age and ugliness.

The language of this rejection (*sed incitat me*, 7), however, suggests at the same time an ironic attraction of the revolted speaker to the woman whose bedchamber he shares.²⁴ The speaker describes her naked body harshly as he looks on it, but how did someone so disgusted with the *Vetula* end up in her bed in the first place? Her body, described with “stomach-churning but intimate familiarity” in Lindsay Watson's apt description, arouses both disgust and attraction to the unattractive object.²⁵ Horace's iambic poetics so hyperbolically describe the woman as to call into question the boundaries separating the beautiful from the disgusting, since descriptions of both types of object captivate and transfix an audience. As the poem concludes, the speaker does not leave in disgust—as this description suggests should happen—but rather concedes to a sexual encounter with the woman despite his repulsion. It is worth noting here that the adjective describing her stomach, *mollis*, becomes a programmatically attractive quality of elegiac women in Propertius and later in Ovid's *Amores*. In Horace's iambic parody of such descriptions of a beloved's beauty, however, this soft belly, *mollis venter* (8.9), is an object of disgust and becomes a mark of erotic iambic's distance from other contemporary Roman poetry.

The *Vetula*'s conspicuous consumption of wealth in the second half of the poem could prove attractive, but does not. Amidst the speaker's rancor are material and literary markers of the *Vetula*'s elite status, and Horace's deployment of diminutives and neologism gives the passage a Neoteric refinement at odds with the iambic invective of the poem's first half (11–20):

esto beata, funus atque imagines
 ducant triumphales tuum
 nec sit marita quae rotundioribus
 onusta bacis ambulet.
 quid? quod libelli Stoici inter Sericos 15
 iacere pulvillos amant,
 inlitterati num minus nervi rigent²⁶
 minusve languet fascinum?
 quod ut superbo provoces ab inguine,
 ore adlaborandum est tibi.²⁷ 20

Granted that you are rich, and that *imagines* of triumphant generals lead your funeral procession, and there is no other wife who strolls burdened with rounder pearls. So what? Just because your little Stoic books delight to lie amongst silken pillows, do uneducated sinews stiffen less or does my member droop any less? In order for you to call it up from my haughty groin you need to work hard with your mouth.²⁸

The speaker chastises the *Vetula* for publicly parading her *triumphales imagines* in her funeral (11), as Watson (2003, 302–3) wryly suggests, hinting that she is already dead. Yet this attention to her *imagines* and her large pearls (*rotundiores bacae*, 13–4) distinguishes her own and her family's high status and wealth. The woman's luxury goods, such as pearls, along with imported silks and even Greek philosophical texts (*libelli Stoici*, 15), are products of the Roman Empire's expansion into the Greek East which are specifically associated with sexual promiscuity in contemporary Roman love poetry (cf. Propertius 1.2.1–4; Tibullus 2.3.51–8) and elsewhere in Roman moralizing discourses.²⁹ Horace's language borrows from the highly polished Neoteric style of Catullus and his coterie through his use of the diminutive ending (*libelli*, 15; *pulvillos*, 16) to characterize the elite objects in her bedroom.³⁰ Horace is also innovative in his Latin here: this passage marks the importation of the adjective *sericus* into Latin (Watson 2003, 305), an adjective of which the Greek cognate, σιρικός, is first attested in Greek of the Augustan Age (*Peripl. M. Rubr.* 49; in plural, *Nearch.* apud *Strabo* 15.1.20).³¹ This poem also mixes conspicuously literary style alongside low words that do not occur elsewhere in poetic usage; this particular admixture of *luxuria* and poetic refinement with the speaker's disgust is used again to characterize the Horatian speaker's and the *mulier's* iambics in *Epode* 12.³²

The concluding lines of *Epode* 8 offer a remarkably dense collection of

vocabulary for male genitals and sexual actions, and thus evoke the hyperphallic language of Greek iambic poetry in a vivid description of the poet speaker's genitals and sex acts.³³ *Nervus* (17) and *fascinum* (18) are both terms for the *membrum virile* (Adams 1990, 38, 63–4), while *rigere* and its antithesis *languere* (17–8) describe its activity and inactivity (Adams 1990, 46). This sexually euphemistic language characterizes the speaker as soft and impotent, and looks to the representation of the speaker's body throughout the *Epodes*. Horace turns sharp-edged wit against the speaker in the last lines: in order to give the speaker sexual satisfaction, the *Vetula* must fellate him (19–20), debasing both herself, by assuming an active sexual role, and the speaker, who is further unmanned by becoming the passive partner in a sexual activity (Henderson 1999, 105–6; Parker 1997, 49–59). The poem thus ends in self-irony, and bodily invective turns against the speaker when he admits that the hyperphallic language of Archilochean invective, as mapped onto his own enervated member, needs help to reach its climax. This concluding insult against the male speaker of *Epode* 8 forecasts the upper hand that the *mulier* of *Epode* 12 will hold over the speaker in a second episode of sexual embarrassment. In each poem, bodily invective attacks both the speaker and his target.

In the *Epodes*, the persona is not the masterful lyric bard of the *Odes*, but Horace's impotent iambic alter-ego. Critics have read this *impotentia* very broadly to refer to Horatian weakness in the changing political landscape of the Triumviral period, when the later success of Octavian was still in dispute, as well as more narrowly to characterize sexual impotence and bodily weakness.³⁴ This *impotentia* has physical symptoms expressed in the speaker's body throughout the *Epodes*, but it can also be linked to a contemporary literary-critical vocabulary of softness and languor, *mollitia* and *inertia*, which Horace borrows from emergent Roman love elegy and transforms from its metaphorical usage there describing elegiac style into pejorative terms characterizing the speaker's sexual failures and his broader failures of masculinity, and as denunciations of the flesh of his repulsive sexual partner in these erotic invective poems.³⁵

In many of the *Epodes*, as in *Epode* 8, Horace uses the language of *mollitia* to distinguish his poetics and his iambic poetic ego from the Archilochean model.³⁶ As in its broader usage in Roman gendered invective, *mollis* becomes a term of unmanning and frequently a sexualized insult within the *Epodes*, directed against the speaker, the *mulier* of *Epode* 8, and against Roman men in general.³⁷ *Mollis* first appears in *Epode* 1, when the speaker fears that he cannot manage to support Maecenas as strong men

(*non mollis viros*) should, because of his characteristic weakness: both he and his *Epodes* will be unwarlike and too soft, *imbellis et firmus parum* (*Epod.* 1.10, 1.16). In the erotic invectives, *mollis* describes the unattractive, soft flesh of the woman's stomach (*venter mollis*, 8.9), and the speaker's sexual impotence (*mihi semper ad unum / mollis opus*, 12.15–6). In its final appearance, the adjective describes the worst part of the Roman citizenry who will not abandon Rome in *Epode* 16: *mollis et exspes / inominata perpremat cubilia* (Let the effeminate and defeatist [part] press their accursed beds, 37–8).

In *Epodes* 11 and 14, the adjective *mollis* appears as a metagenic marker showing the influence of Roman love elegy on Horace's iambics. Horace's engagement with Roman love elegy is most clearly seen in *Epode* 11, where the vocabulary and situations find ample parallels in early Propertian and Tibullan elegy, and in Vergil's incorporation of Gallan elegy into *Eclogue* 10.³⁸ This poem, first termed by Friedrich Leo as *plane elegia in iambis concepta*,³⁹ uses *mollis* and *mollities* in two lines marked with erotic elegiac resonances. First, the poet-speaker burns for soft boys and girls (*mollibus in pueris aut in puellis urere*, 4), a turn of phrase echoed in Ovid's programmatic *Amores* 1.1 when the *amator* names the proper subject matter for Roman love elegy: *nec mihi materia est numeris levioribus apta / aut puer aut longas compta puella comas* (*Am.* 1.1.19–20). Second, at the end of *Epode* 11, the speaker reveals that now the love of Lyciscus holds him, a boy who rivals any woman in softness (*gloriantis quamlibet mulierculam / vincere mollitie*, 23–4). As *Epode* 14 begins, Horace justifies why he has not completed his book of iambi despite Maecenas's frequent requests: soft languishing (*mollis inertia*, 1) has overwhelmed his senses. Critics have noted that *Epode* 14 reflects Horace opening his Roman iambi out into the influence of Catullus and anticipates his own later lyric topics, but I would add that the coincidence of elegiac vocabulary here at its outset⁴⁰ is also an appropriate choice for a poem devoted to the erotic feelings of the Horatian speaker and Maecenas.

In the emerging Roman love elegy of Propertius and Tibullus, however, the adjectives *mollis* and *iners*, and the nouns *inertia* and *mollitia*, appear frequently both as characteristics of poetic aesthetic principles and as qualities of the bodies of the speakers or love objects. This tendency towards metapoetic self-expression is particularly pronounced in programmatic poems, but scholars have thoroughly traced this slippage between the human bodies figured within the genre and the terms of its stylistic aesthetics throughout Propertian, Tibullan, and later Ovidian elegiac poetry.⁴¹ In Maria Wyke's (2002, 204–5) influential formulation,

these stylistic qualities become the very ‘grammar’ that composes the bodies of elegiac women. Propertian and Ovidian elegy pervasively conflate the personal style and shape of the human body with elegiac principles of literary style. Softness, or *mollitia*, is one of these central defining characteristics. The elegiac *puella* walks softly and has a delicate art (*molliter incedit. . . mollior esse viro*: Ovid, *Am.* 2.4.23–4; *soleant molliter ire pedes*, Propertius 2.12.24; *mollis ab arte*: Ovid, *Am.* 2.4.30 [Keith 1994, 33–5]). Yet this language of softness also describes Propertius’s own compositions: he composes soft verse and a soft book (*mollem componere versum*, 1.7.19; *mollis liber*, 2.1.2), and it is a frequent descriptor of Propertius’s elegiac style in the Callimachean programmatic suite of 3.1–3.3 where the poet’s garlands, the shade of Mount Helicon, and the metaphorical poetic meadows are all soft (*mollia sarta poetae*, 3.1.19; *mollis Heliconis in umbra*, 3.3.1; *mollia prata terenda*, 3.3.18). Throughout these citations, *mollis* and *mollitia* become revalued as prized characteristics of soft poetry and the soft, elegant, and refined bodies that inhabit the Callimachean genre.

Outside of elegy, however, *mollitia* is a quality scorned in men (Williams 1999, 125–32). In discussions of Roman masculinity, it is routinely translated as “effeminacy.”⁴² As the elder Seneca’s rather extreme condemnation of young men’s style at *Controv.* 1.praef. 8–9 shows, *mollitia* marks a failure of masculinity and is one of the many features that characterized an effeminate Roman male:

torpent ecce ingenia desidiosae iuventutis nec in unius honestae rei labore vigilatur; somnus languorque ac somno et languore turpior malarum rerum industria invasit animos: cantandi saltandique obscena studia effeminatos tenent, [et] capillum frangere et ad muliebres blanditias extenuare vocem, *mollitia corporis certare cum feminis* et immundissimis se excolere munditiis nostrorum adulescentium specimen est. *quis aequalium vestrorum* quid dicam satis ingeniosus, satis studiosus, *immo quis satis vir est? emolliti enervesque* quod nati sunt in vita manent, expugnatores alienae pudicitiae, negligentes suae.

Behold the brains of our indolent youth are inactive nor does even one of them stay awake in the work of a single worthwhile effort; sleep and languor and zeal of bad acts more degrading than sleep and languor invades their spirits; the obscene pursuits of singing and dancing hold those effeminate, and to break the hair and to weaken the voice to womanish flatteries, *to rival women in the softness of their bodies*,

and to cultivate themselves with the foulest adornments, these are the ideals of our youths. *Who of your age mates* is there who I could say is sufficiently intellectual, sufficiently studious, *who truly is man enough?* As *effeminate and nerveless* as they are born they remain throughout their lives, assaulting the chastity of others, while heedless of their own.

As Catherine Edwards (1993) has shown, *mollitia* appears in invective contexts like Seneca's to police failures of normative Roman masculinity. Used as an invective term, *mollitia* speaks to a broader breakdown of socially constructed manhood often manifested in sartorial and gestural manners. The man who is *mollis* wears soft, expensive clothing, perfumes, and cosmetics, and is timid, lazy, self-indulgent, and luxurious. *Mollitia* can carry a sexual significance as well, where it describes men who are said to take the passive role in sexual activities as well as men who are sexually promiscuous or possess excessive libido.⁴³ This pejorative range of meanings better matches Horace's usage in the *Epodes*, where *mollitia* is further used to describe the speaker's sexual failures and his soft, promiscuous proclivity to partner with women he finds so disgusting. Horace, I argue, deploys a sense of softness as a narrowly embodied insult of sexual impotence and as a quality of undesirable female flesh in *Epodes* 8 and 12 to challenge the pervasive reevaluation of *mollis* in Roman love elegy, a genre that helped shape the polymetric second half of Horace's *iambi* (Harrison 2007, 125–35; Johnson 2012, 138–44).

The language of *mollitia* is first used in embodied erotic invective in *Epode* 8 and it will recur in its twin, *Epode* 12, yet it appears throughout the *Epodes* as a description for men. An adjective describing delightful and seductive female flesh in Propertian elegy becomes here a disgusted vituperation of a woman too eager to play the active sexual role. This term has literal, social, and literary significance, as will become even more clear when it describes the speaker's sexual failure in *Epode* 12, a poem that links Horace's iambic poetics more overtly to the terms of literary style *mollitia*, *inertia*, and *rabies*.

Epode* 12: Metaliterary Language and the Rejection of Sexual *Mollitia*, *Inertia*, and *Rabies

Epodes 8 and 12 have often been taken as a pair for good reason, as they create similar narrative situations.⁴⁴ *Epode* 12, I argue, is also open to a metapoetic reading, with its density of references to Hellenistic and

Neoteric literature and to the literary stylistic terminology of *mollitia*, *inertia*, and *rabies*, words that can characterize both sexualized, gendered bodies and poetic genres. Thus, *Epode* 12 mingles literal sexual obscenity with literary polish. Through his own virulent invective against the sexualized body in *Epodes* 8 and 12, Horace participates in the style of *iambos* most associated with the archaic exemplars Archilochus, Hipponax, and Semonides.⁴⁵ Horace's Roman *iambos*, however, transforms the genre through the richly literary resonance of the speaker's and the *mulier's* voices with contemporary Roman poetics. This poem, then, I would argue, continues to broaden the scope of what Horatian iambic is.

While earlier critics have noted the influence of Roman erotic elegiac tropes and *topoi* in Horace's final polymetric *Epodes* (11–17), I maintain that Horace's *Epode* 12 incorporates the literary stylistic terms of *mollitia* and *inertia* from Roman love elegy into a profoundly iambic poem redolent of archaic Greek *iambos*. This incorporation characterizes the poet-speaker as effeminate—too soft and lazy to make a capable sexual partner—but not as a speaker lacking in vituperative iambic power. While the *mulier's* invective characterizes the poet-speaker in the language of Roman love elegy, the terms here have not undergone the reclamation they will later in Tibullus and Propertius. Thus, the iambic poet pillories the stance of the elegiac poet-speaker by placing his iambic speaker in a situation that parodies the power structures of Roman love elegy, where a *puella* holds power over the enslaved speaker.⁴⁶ Horace's rebarbative iambs serve to right Roman love elegy's apparently topsy-turvy power structures by reasserting the normative meanings of *mollitia* and *inertia* as failures of masculinity. The *mulier*, on the other hand, is characterized by her too iambic body because she possesses an excess of the quintessential, genre-defining *rabies*. Horace's iambic speaker is chastened for his effeminacy and indolence, and elegy's superficially inverted vision of a world where women hold mastery is rejected.

I begin, again, with a close reading of the poem's obscenities before turning to a metapoetic reading. *Epode* 12 makes thorough use of bestial comparisons and animal imagery; this imagery characterizes both speakers of the poem, and the final lines insert a surprising gender reversal accomplished through this animal imagery. The poem falls into three sections: the speaker's rejection of the woman (1–6), the description of the woman's body in bed (7–12), and the woman's speech complaining of his impotence (13–26). First, the speaker rejects a further sexual relationship because of her overly strong smell and her animalistic lust (1–12):

quid tibi vis, mulier nigris dignissima barris?
 munera quid mihi quidve tabellas
 mittis nec firmo iuveni neque naris obesae?
 namque sagacius unus odoror,
 polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis 5
 quam canis acer ubi lateat sus.
 qui sudor vietis et quam malus undique membris
 crescit odor, cum pene soluto
 indomitam properat rabiem sedare, neque illi
 iam manet umida creta colorque 10
 stercore fucatus crocodili, iamque subando
 tenta cubilia tectaque rumpit.

What's up with you, woman most fit for black elephants? Why do you send gifts and love letters to me, an unfirm young man and with a nose not undiscerning? For I above all others sniff out more keenly than a swift dog where the pig hides, whether a foul-smelling polyp beds in your nose or a billy-goat beds in your shaggy armpits. What a sweat and what a bad smell rises all over her wrinkled limbs, when she hastens to calm her unconquerable frenzy with my slack penis, nor does her damp chalk remain or her blush dyed with crocodile dung and now she is breaking the bed stretched tight and the canopy with her rutting.

The poem opens with beast-analogy when the woman's body is envisioned through a series of animal comparisons.⁴⁷ She is more suited to black elephants (1),⁴⁸ her armpits reek like a musky billy-goat (5),⁴⁹ she is like the pig hunted by the speaker's hunting dog (6), and her blush is made of foul-smelling crocodile dung (11). Her sexual passion, like her appearance, is also animalistic. *Rabies* is more commonly used as a term for animal rather than human passion in Lucretius, Vergil, and Propertius (Lucretius 5.1065, of a hound; Vergil, *G.* 3.266 and 3.496, of a dog; Propertius 3.16.17, of a dog). Horace, furthermore, implicitly compares the woman's sexual exertions with porcine behavior through his introduction of the term *subare* used for human behavior.⁵⁰

Animal comparisons also describe the speaker, and link the imagery of *Epode* 12 to other iambic and lyric moments in the Horatian corpus. The speaker's sense of smell uses the technical vocabulary for a hunting dog's scenting power (*sagax, odoror*; Watson 2003, 396). Here the programmatic iambic imagery of the poet as dog (*Epod.* 6.1–6) enters the bedroom when the speaker is compared to the keen-nosed hunting dog

capable of sniffing out its prey.⁵¹ The close connection between animal imagery and sexual passion recurs in the woman's speech as she turns the speaker's iambic rhetoric against him. While she wanted a worthy bed-partner, she ends up with a *taurus iners* (17), a near oxymoron because of the bull's association with the sexual drive (Mankin 1995, 211).⁵² The poem concludes with a sexual role-reversal expressed through an animal simile. Throughout the poem, the woman has been the sexual aggressor, yet the speaker had also been characterized as an aggressive hunting dog. Now, in her concluding lines, the woman compares herself to wolves and lions, and the speaker becomes a trembling lamb or deer (*ut pavet acris / agna lupos capreaeque leones*, 25–6). Her language characterizes the speaker as passive prey in the erotic hunt, reversing the gender roles typical for this metaphor, and finds a close comparison in Horace's own poetic persona in *Odes* 1.23.9–10, where Horace exploits animal comparisons to characterize Chloe's coming ripeness in similar language (*atqui non ego te, tigris ut aspera / Gaetulusve leo, frangere persequor*).⁵³

Woman is the sexual aggressor, as in *Epode* 8. Here, however, the woman is given the chance to speak her proposition to the speaker, in which she attacks his sexual prowess as well as his masculinity. She deflates the priapic masculinity of the Horatian iambist by her accusations of *mollitia* (softness) and *inertia* (torpor), words burdened with both literal and literary significance in Roman culture. On the literal level, these words describe the iambic speaker's sexual impotence. Read on a metaliterary level, however, these words link this most sexually obscene of the *Epodes* to Horace's enrichment of Archilochean iambus by his deployment of the tropes and lexicon of contemporary Roman erotic elegy and its Alexandrian and Neoteric heritage (13–26):⁵⁴

vel mea cum saevis agitat fastidia verbis:
 'Inachia langues minus ac me;
 Inachiam ter nocte potes, mihi semper ad unum 15
 mollis opus. pereat male, quae te
 Lesbia quaerenti taurum monstravit inertem.
 cum mihi Cous adesset Amyntas,
 cuius in indomito constantior inguine nervus
 quam nova collibus arbor inhaeret. 20
 muricibus Tyriis iteratae vellera lanae
 cui properabantur? tibi nempe,
 ne foret aequalis inter conviva, magis quem
 diligeret mulier sua quam te.

o ego non felix, quam tu fugis, ut pavet acris 25
 agna lupos capreaeque leones!

Or when she vexes my disgust with savage words: “You are less limp with Inachia than with me; you can do it three times a night with Inachia, with me you are always soft at one go. To hell with Lesbia, who, when I sought a bull, pointed out sluggish you instead. Even though Coan Amyntas was available for me, whose sinews stand more firm in his unconquerable groin than a young tree clings to the hillside. For whom were the fleeces of wool twice-dyed in Tyrian purples hastily fashioned? For you of course, lest there be a guest among your peers, whose woman loved him more than yours loves you. Oh I am unlucky, since you flee, like a lamb fears fierce wolves and the roe deer fears lions!”

In her retort, the *mulier* overtly mocks the speaker’s sexual ability by reversing his phallic braggadocio; though he is too soft with her for even one effort (*mihi semper ad unum / mollis opus*, 15–6), he is more potent with Inachia and can perform sexually three times in one night. *Amores* 3.7 offers a similar usage of the sexual endurance trope: while the Ovidian speaker is hopelessly impotent now, he claims that with other partners he could make love two, three, or even nine times in a single night (3.7.23–6).⁵⁵ She also employs subtler insults to his masculinity by accusing him of enjoying rich foreign clothing dyed with Tyrian dye (21–2). For a Roman man, to wear luxurious imported and dyed fabrics marked him with softness or effeminacy (*mollitia*), and these sartorial details accuse him of effeminacy as effectively as her charges of sexual impotence have done (Olson 2014, 184–6, 190–3). Moreover, when the speaker accepts the woman’s gift of clothing, he inverts the standard direction of exchange between an autonomous Roman citizen male and a Roman courtesan who accepts the gifts.⁵⁶ Thus, the *mulier* returns bodily invective with her own bodily invective and slanders the speaker’s failed masculinity. At the same time, like the Horatian iambist in *Epodes* 8 and 12, her speech mingles highly literary language rich in metaliterary references with coarse, euphemistic sexual metaphor.

The *mulier*’s speech evokes Catullus, Vergil’s *Eclogues*, and Theocritus, as it reduces key words of Augustan poetic style to embodied sexual meanings. Although the proper interpretation of Lesbia’s name in line 17 has been debated by the commentators,⁵⁷ it is hard to resist a literary reading that looks back to Catullus’s Lesbia,⁵⁸ particularly when Lesbia

is herself followed by Coan Amyntas. The adjective “Coan” suggests the birthplace of the Hellenistic poet Philitas, but it also looks directly to Theocritus’s programmatic seventh *Idyll*, set on Cos, where Amyntas and Eucritus accompany the first-person narrator on their walk to the harvest festival (7.1). Moreover, characters called Amyntas appear eleven times in Vergil’s *Eclogues*, modeled on Theocritus’s *Idylls*.⁵⁹ Thus, in the *mulier*’s speech, explicit and euphemistic sexual language characteristic of Greek and Roman *iambos* mingles with names rich with Alexandrian and Neoteric literary resonances.

The *mulier* literalizes two key poetic style terms of Propertian and Tibullan love elegy and transfers them to a narrowly embodied, sexualized meaning. First, the iambic speaker was firm with Inachia, yet he is soft (*mollis*) for this *mulier* (16). This pejorative embodied sexual sense of the term, elsewhere valorized in Propertius and Ovid as characteristic of elegiac style, is in keeping with Horatian metapoetics in *Epode* 8 and is also consistent with Horace’s usage throughout the *Epodes*. Here the term refers to his sexual impotence and points to his unmistakable *mollitia*. Second, the *mulier* regrets that Lesbia has duped her with a flaccid bull, a *taurus iners*.

As David Wray (2003, 224–6) has argued, *iners* and *inertia* become programmatic Tibullan language for his poetic choice of the elegiac genre in Tibullus 1.1, as well as for the poet-speaker’s chosen lifestyle of an alternative Roman masculinity (*vita iners*, 5; *tecum / dum modo sim, quaeso segnīs inersque vocer*, 57–8). Like *mollitia*, the accusation of *inertia* similarly unmans (Wray 2003, 224–6). For Wray, *inertia* opposes the ideal of *virtus*, idealized Roman masculinity and manliness, but Tibullus reclaims this pejorative term as a stylistic and human quality characteristic of the non-normative elegiac lover. The woman of *Epode* 12, when she points out the speaker as an impotent stud-bull, a *taurus iners*, makes no such act of linguistic reclamation. Horace, in playing off this stylistic term characteristic of Tibullus’s most programmatic opening poem, mocks the elegiac attempt to valorize a new, potentially oppositional form of manhood defined in the lifestyle of the elegiac lover, who rejects traditional Roman social *mores* and norms of masculinity in favor of the soft and lazy life of the erotic love affair.⁶⁰

Outside of Tibullus’s first poem, Roman poetry typically features *iners* as a term of abuse associated with sexual impotence or simply as a mark of infertility.⁶¹ The term appears twice in Catullus, twice describes a speaker’s impotent penis in Ovid *Amores* 3.7 and in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, and qualifies impotent and infertile animals in Columella’s *De re*

rustica. In Catullus, *iners* modifies the *concupinus* the groom will abandon when he takes a bride who will produce offspring at 61.124; here a fertile erotic relationship replaces a sterile one. The term recurs in 67.26, in a passage with clear invective content, when it describes the father who dishonored his own son's partner, perhaps because he was born impotent with sterile seed (*seu quod iners sterili semine natus erat*). In a priapic poem found in the *Appendix Vergiliana*, the speaker's aged and useless penis fails to respond (*nec viriliter / iners senile penis extulit caput*, *Carm.* 4–5), and in Columella's *De re rustica*, the term describes an impotent stud horse (6.27.10.1) and the infertile progeny of an aged mare (6.28.1.5).⁶² In *Amores* 3.7, Ovid gives the adjective its most precise linkage to the impotent penis anywhere in Roman poetics: *truncus iners iacui, species et inutile pondus* (3.7.15).⁶³ His usage, despite its appearance in canonical Roman love elegy, follows the broader linguistic connotation of the term, rather than the reclaimed sense of the term found in Tibullus 1.1, where it refers to the *modus vivendi* of the poet-speaker and not to the languor of his body.

The woman's mockery of her lover's failed virility thus vividly intensifies the language of *impotentia* Horace turns against his own iambic speaker throughout the *Epodes*. Her invective, moreover, through meta-poetic language that narrowly literalizes *mollitia* and *inertia* as failures of sexual virility, recasts some of the buzzwords of the emergent elegiac style visible in Propertius's *Monobiblos* and in Tibullus's Book 1.

In light of the metaliterary reading of the *mulier's* speech, it is possible to see that when the speaker attacks the insatiable sexual desire of the *mulier*, her *indomita rabies* (*Epode* 12.9), he himself also transfers *rabies*, a stylistic term that Horace later states is characteristic of Archilochean and iambic poetry (*Ars P.* 79–82), to an embodied sexual invective. In *Epode* 12, the connotation and the semantic range of *rabies* are constrained to a sexual meaning. The Horatian speaker reduces *iambos's* programmatic anger to an embodied sexual frenzy, comparable to the behavior of animals, which the *mulier* cannot quench: *cum pene soluto / indomitam properat rabiem sedare* (when she hastens to calm her unconquered frenzy with my slack penis, 8–9). Lucretius employs this term to refer to the maddened lust of the lover in his diatribe against love: *inde redit rabies eadem et furor ille revisit* (4.1117; cf. 4.1083). Vergil uses *rabies* to describe the effects of the plague on dogs: *hinc canibus blandis rabies venit, et quatit aegros* (*G.* 3.496). Columella speaks of *hippomanes* in this terminology as well: *rara quidem sed et haec equarum nota rabies* (6.35.1.1). Horace, in his usage of *rabies* outside of *Epode* 12 (*Carm.* 1.3.14, 1.15.12,

3.24.26; *Serm.* 2.3.323; *Epist.* 1.10.16, 2.1.149), does not use this sexualized connotation. While these broader usages foretell against a single sexualized reading, in its context in *Epode* 12 the meaning of *rabies* must be construed as sexual frenzy.⁶⁴ Like the *mollitia* and *inertia* of *Epode* 12 and elsewhere, *rabies* can be read literally and literarily, and its sexualized connotation reduces the stylistic characteristics of iambic poetry in Horace's literary genealogies to an embodied invective.

When Horace turns to an explicit literary history of poetic genres in the *Ars poetica*, *rabies* (anger or madness) becomes the emotion that drove Archilochus to invent the iambic meter and offered the genesis of *iambos* (79–82):

Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo;
 hunc socci cepere pedem grandesque cothurni, 80
 alternis aptum sermonibus et popularis
 vincentem strepitus et natum rebus agendis.

Rage armed Archilochus with its own iamb; comic and great tragic boots took up this foot fit for alternating speeches and for conquering the din of the crowd and born for action.

Rabies armed Archilochus with a meter suitable for his content and distinguished it from other poetry of unequal verses such as querulous *elegia* (*Ars P.* 75–7). In Horace's explicit claims of the literary genealogy of Archilochus's iambic poetry, content gave rise to an appropriate metrical form. When *rabies* encourages the free expression of iambic poetry meant to shame and police the behavior of others back into socially acceptable activities, it is the generic marker of the iambic spirit. At *Epistles* 2.1, Horace again uses *rabies* to describe the potential of verse (*versibus alternis*, 146) to change from a savage joke into open rage that destroyed communities (*donec iam saevus apertam / in rabiem coepit verti iocus et per honestas / ire domos impune minax*, 148–50).⁶⁵ Thus, in Horace's later explicit literary-critical explorations of *rabies* in poetry, Archilochus earns credit for *iambos*'s creation and the genre began as a meter suited for anger (*rabies*, *Ars P.* 79), while Roman comic poetry has always held the potential to become destructive rage (*aperta rabies*, *Epist.* 2.1.148–9).⁶⁶

In Johnson's recent (2012) reading, Horace's iambic criticism continues from his early *Epodes* through the *Ars poetica*. Johnson cautions against the old chestnut that the older Horace is a tempered version of his

younger self, and instead shows the continuity of Horace's attacks against aging women (*Carm.* 1.25, 3.15, 4.13) across Horatian iambic, lyric, and epistolary poetry (2012, 231–3).⁶⁷ These literary-critical images of poetic rage in Horace's *Epistles*, I argue, allow a metapoetic reading of the woman's sexual frenzy in *Epode* 12. In the phrase *indomita rabies*, Horace has circumscribed the meaning of a literary critical term into an embodied word that mocks the behavior of the woman just as she mocks the speaker for his softness and torpor.

Epodes 8 and 12 in particular give circumscribed, narrowly embodied meanings to terms used to characterize certain styles of poetry, such as the *rabies* of *iambos* and the *mollitia* and *inertia* of Roman elegiac poetry.⁶⁸ Horace's practice in these poems has precedent, since Roman rhetoricians and poets made frequent analogies between the human body and types of style.⁶⁹ Horace himself frequently employed the human body as a metaphor for style in the first book of his *Sermones*, published in 35 BCE (Freudenburg 2005, 11). The body of poetry and the body of the poet who produce it are conflated at *Sermones* 1.4.56–62, where the speaker imagines removing the meter and rearranging the words from lines of Ennian epic or from Horatian or Lucilian satire.⁷⁰ While Ennius's epic hexameters remain poetic, satire, when rearranged, yields only the limbs of a torn-apart poet, *disiecti membra poetae* (1.4.62). In the same poem, Lucilius's muddy, too-long, too-quickly composed, and under-edited style is imagined as a personality trait: *ut magnum, versus dictabat stans pede in uno / cum flueret lutulentus, erat quod tollere velles* (1.4.10–1).⁷¹ In line with his own and broader Roman practice, Horace's poetics map literary styles onto the bodies of its iambic targets, both the speaker and the *mulier*. The speaker exhibits *mollitia* and *inertia*, positive qualities of elegiac poetic style that can also describe physical impotence within iambic, and the women's bodies and behaviors are also qualified by literary style terms (*mollis venter*, 8.9; *rabies indomita*, 12.9). As in his first book of *Satires*, the iambic Horace employs the sexual bodies of those he insults as carriers of terms of literary style. The male and female bodies represented in these *Epodes* thus trace a metapoetic exploration of iambic genre and its distance from the emergent Roman love elegy.

In my reading of *rabies*, *mollitia*, and *inertia* in *Epodes* 8 and especially 12, I have argued that Horace's awareness of literary critical discourses of style informs his representation of bodily invective. Barchiesi (2001, 144–6) has elaborated on the affiliation within Horace's literary criticism in the *Ars poetica* between iambic style and content (*rabies*) and the metrical form of the iambic *pes*, coterminous with the human body part.

Horace, in the *Ars poetica*, surprisingly turns the metaphor around, so that iambic style becomes the vehicle for the expression of the metrical iamb. The iambic foot is anthropomorphized and displays the speed, beat, and violence characteristic of iambic abusive style, before it is later restrained and socialized (*hunc socci cepere pedem gravesque cothurni*, *Ars P.* 80; cf. 251–62). Thus, in Barchiesi's reading, Horatian iambic is inherently a poetic genre prone to collapsing poetic style and the shape and qualities of the human body. Similarly, much elegiac scholarship has formulated the idea that elegiac style is expressed in terms of bodily adjectives and embodied characteristics, and that there is a strong analogue between the bodies of its characters and the style of the genre. In his later lyric work, Horace himself acknowledges the elegiac tendency to analogize the human body to the elegiac style (Keith 1999). Expanding upon these readings of Horatian literary criticism and Roman love elegy, I propose that Horatian iambic style already in *Epodes* 8 and 12 collapses rejected stylistic qualities of poetic genres into the bodies of the characters it produces.

Conclusions

In *Epodes* 8 and 12, Horace's iambic speaker targets women through eye-popping *aischrologia* intended to shame and wound and perhaps to raise a shocked laugh as well, as Horace offers a virtuoso display of sexual invective coded in the language of the genre of *iambos* he renewed from its archaic heritage. This sexual invective participates equally in the work of distinguishing Horace's *Epodes* from other contemporary Roman erotic poets.

This metapoetic reading has thus far somewhat neglected the political ramifications of Horace's *Epodes* 8 and 12, arguably Roman culture's most overtly misogynistic poems. How then can we as critics remain mindful of the work these poems do to create Roman ideologies of gender and sexuality?⁷² As Schubert (2012, 37, 50), reminds us, echoing Henderson's readings (1999, 2009), in our desire as critics to historicize Horace's *Epodes* in Greek and Roman *aischrologia* and in our search for iambic parallels, do we excuse the vulgarity and pornographic character of these *Epodes* by defending the higher artistic purpose of the whole endeavor?

By labeling the women of *Epodes* 8 and 12 revolting, the speaker concludes with his audience to create a homosocial community based on the exclusion of women who attempt to play an active role in a sexual relationship. The poet embraces and uses structural misogyny for poetic effect, likening the flesh of his lovers to wild animals and to the dead. In

this reading, Horace's iambic poetics, like slut-shaming and trolling comments on the Internet, serve to re-inscribe the cultural norms of a priapic Roman masculinity supported by the systematic domination of women, foreigners, and slaves (Richlin 1992; Skinner 1997a, 1997b; Wray 2001, 115–43). Is this representation so intensely discomfiting and out of the ordinary, like the black comedy of Ovid's representations of female flesh debased and dehumanized in the *Metamorphoses*, that it calls up a laugh? Are these poems, in other words, parody? Parody can provide a safe outlet for the expression of ethically dubious ideas, where the speaker can use words that are unspeakable in daily life for the sake of encouraging a laugh in her or his audience. Comparable to the ritually sanctioned use of *aischrologia*, where communities of worshippers were allowed to transgress the normal social order restricting the discussion of sexually explicit matters to build community, Horace's obscene representations of the sexualized human body grant the poet an opportunity to transgress momentarily the limits of typical poetic representation. Yet parody cuts both ways, and can also serve merely to reinforce Roman gender structures that favor the masculine, the young, the sexually attractive, and the decorous over the female, the old, and the gauche.

In these sexual invectives, Horace's own iambic speaker is characterized as impotent. Do the character's *inertia* and *mollitia* jeopardize Horace's attempts at a Roman iambic genre because the speaker just does not quite measure up? Does the speaker's vituperative firepower turn against these women because he represents both the newly disempowered status of the Roman elite male unseated from his stable position by the decade of civil war and the emerging autocracy of Augustus, and Horace's own anxieties that he cannot speak freely to Maecenas? My close reading of sexual invective in *Epodes* 8 and 12 argues along metapoetic rather than political lines that the speaker's weakness is a feature of Horace's rejection of the elegiac subject as a model. Under the biting iambic scrutiny of Archilochean venom and rage, elegiac *mollitia* and *inertia* return to their expected places in Roman discourses of sexuality and gender, and Horatian *iambos*, despite its transgressive language of sexual obscenity, serves to reinforce, rather than challenge, Roman ideologies of masculinity.⁷³

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Notes

1 This is a notoriously vexing passage to construe, and critics have long commented on the obscurity of the difference between following the spirit (*animos Archilochi*), and not following the matter (*res*). Cf. Fraenkel 1957, 342–50; Mankin 1995, 7; Watson 2003, 5–8, 43–4; and Johnson's extended discussion in 2012, 36–43.

2 As Richlin (1992, 109) and Henderson (1999, 94) note. Günther (2013, 199) describes this tone most clearly: "*Epode* 8 reduces the obscenities of Archilochus' figurative

language to *nuda verba* and creates, in its compression of detail and devastating realism, an image of aged flesh and repulsive sexuality that in its shocking violence and realism is, to my knowledge, without peer in ancient literature and perhaps even surpasses the brutality of modern exposures of repulsive fleshliness.”

3 Despite the speaker’s enfeebled appearance, critics have read the speaker’s final silence at the end of *Epode* 17 as an act of power against Canidia: see Oliensis 1998 and Barchiesi 2009.

4 Horace too had surely had the opportunity to read and respond to Cornelius Gallus’s four books of the *Amores*, now almost entirely lost to us, save the important Qasr Ibrim papyrus fragment, first published in 1979 by Anderson et al. Ross’s important study (1975) shows how influential Gallan elegy was on later Augustan poetry, and more recently Cairns (2006) has explored his influence on Propertius’s *Monobiblos* and Tibullus’s Book 1.

5 Critics have long recognized the appearance of elegy’s tropes and *topoi*, especially in *Epode* 11. See Leo 1900, Luck 1976, Barchiesi 1994a, and Harrison 2001 and 2007.

6 Recently there have been a few challenges to the standard chronology: Heslin (2010) dates Propertius’s publication of the *Monobiblos* in 33/32 BCE, while Knox (2005) dates Tibullus 1 in the 30s, ahead of the publication of Propertius’s Book 1.

7 Lyne (1998, 519–23) offers a clear discussion of the standard chronology for the publication of Propertius’s Book 1 and then Tibullus’s Book 1. Mankin (1995, 10–1), Johnson (2012, 23), and J. N. Hawkins (2014, 63) date the *Epodes* to post-Actium, likely in 31/30 BCE.

8 See Fitzgerald 1988 (below, note 11) on political instability and elite masculinity in the *Epodes*, Miller 2004 on political instability and masculinity in elegy, Corbeill 1996 on humor and political invective about the self-presentation of Caesar and other politicians, and Olson 2014 on dandies in Roman dress.

9 Fraenkel’s (1957, 58) evaluation is typical: “*Epodes* VIII and XII, with all their polish, are repulsive.” Henderson (1999, 288 note 5) catalogues their omission from editions, and their eventual recognition in the 1990s as part of the Horatian canon.

10 Craca (1989, 129–55) offers an important overview of criticism of these *Epodes* prior to 1989. Comprehensive commentaries that printed and engaged all of the *Epodes*, without omitting *Epodes* 8 and 12, first emerged in the 1990s. Kiessling 1958 is an early inclusion. Romano (1991) and Garrison (1991) print and comment on these *Epodes*. Cavarzere (1992) shows that Horace’s *Epodes* draw heavily from Callimachus’s *Iamboi*, while Mankin’s (1995) Cambridge commentary stresses the importance of Archilochean models for Horace’s poetics and uses the tools of criticism applied to archaic Archilochean *iambos* to interpret Horace’s own *Epodi*. Watson’s (2003) Oxford commentary also stresses the continuity of the iambist’s characterization with Archilochean and Hipponactean *iambos* and offers the most comprehensive readings and bibliographies of the individual *Epodes*.

11 First published in 1988 and reprinted in Lowrie 2009. Fitzgerald’s discussion has generated many positive and negative reactions, and his work helped cement readings of sexual impotence as a metaphor for Horace’s iambic misgivings within the context of the civil wars. See representative responses to his work in Oliensis 1991 and 1998, 73–7; Gowers 1993, 288; McMahon 1998, 31–2; and Harrison 2001 and 2007.

12 Johnson 2012, 122–33, 144–6.

13 Johnson 2012, 182–230.

14 A comparable approach to Catullus's poetics of verbal abuse can be found in Wray 2001, esp. 117–26.

15 Luck 1976, Barchiesi 1994a, Harrison 2007, and Heslin 2011.

16 Glinatsis (2013) argues that *Epodes* 8 and 12 are poetological. These poems are actualized forms of the iambic code or theory inherited from Archilochus's stinging invective, which is described in *Epode* 6.

17 Dozier (2015, esp. 315–8) contextualizes Horatian *mollitia* in the *Epodes* as a weakness comparable to the *mollitia* occasionally recommended by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria*, a softening of invective in the midst of political engagement with men of authority.

18 Horace introduces the sexual usage of *enervare* into poetic Latin here. Lucretius (4.1115) and Catullus (67.27) use *nervus* for *membrum virile*; see Watson 2003, 294.

19 Prior readings are found in Newman 1998, Henderson 1999, Johnson 2012, and Schubert 2012.

20 Richlin 1984, 69.

21 Invective poetry in general frequently makes sexual insults through beast-analogy. Cf. Archilochus, Fr. 41W and Fr. 43 W; Semonides, Fr. 7 passim; Phrynichus Fr. 34 K.-A.; Catullus 25.1 and 97.7–8; Priapea 46; Martial 3.93, 9.27.2, 11.21.1, 11.21.10, 11.21.11. See extensive discussion of *Tiervergleiche* in *Epodes* 8 and 12 in Watson 2003, 298, 385–6 and Barabino 1993/1994, 15–29. Bonanno (1990, 88–9) looks to *Epodes* 8.4 to explain the agricultural metaphors in Archilochus's First Cologne Epode.

22 It also follows the rules for an invective description of an oratorical target, following the traditional course from head-to-toe. See Craig 2004, 190–1 on conventional *loci* of invective.

23 The black tooth of the old woman is a common feature of *Vetula-Skoptik*, and traces back to Aristophanes' old women: *Plut.* 1057–9, and *Ecl.* 996, 1030–6, 1101, 1111 (where the woman is portrayed as already dead). It appears in Roman Comedy: Plautus, *Mostell.* 274–5 and Propertius 4.5.68 (*Acanthis*). Within Horace's poetry, see also *Epod.* 5.47 (*Canidia*), *Epod.* 6.15 (of the rival iambist), *Sat.* 1.8.48 (*Canidia* loses her false teeth), and denied at *Carm.* 2.8 (of *Barine's* physical perfection).

24 *Incitat me pectus et mammae putres* here must be “transparently” ironic (Garrison 1991, 183; see also Watson 2003, 288). *Incitare* can have sexual connotation, and mean “to turn on” as it does at Catullus 16.9 (*quod pruriat incitare*), Juvenal 6.315 (*lumbos incitat*) and Appendix Vergiliana Priapeum 44 (= Priapea 83.44–5) (*neque incitare cesset, usque dum mihi / Venus iocosa molle ruperit latus*). This latter poem, addressed to the speaker's own impotent penis, bears many narrative similarities to the erotic situation of *Epodes* 8 and 12, and also features overlapping vocabulary, where *mollis* (45), *iners* (5, 38), and *incitare* (44) are all directed at the male member.

25 Watson (2003, 288–9) highlights the paradox of this phrase. See Henderson 1999, 96–100 on the reader's inability to look away from such a vivid description of female embodied sexuality.

26 I have printed the problematic *minus regent . . . minusve languet* of the manuscript tradition along with Kiessling 1958, 521; Romano 1991, 422; and Mankin 1995, 37. Heinsius suggested *magis* for *minus* in line 17, and his emendation has been endorsed by Watson 2003, 307 and Courtney 2013, 555. See further discussion at Schubert 2012, 42.

27 Latin texts are from Mankin 1995, unless otherwise noted.

28 All translations are my own.

29 See Keith 2008, 139–65 on the association between imports from the Greek East and sexual promiscuity in Propertius. See also Bowditch 2006 and 2009 on imperialism and Propertius, and Dench 1998, 121–46 on Roman moralizing discourses of luxury and its association with sexual promiscuity.

30 See Knox 2013, 538 note 48 on Horace’s lexicon and the infrequency of diminutives in the *Epodes*.

31 See TLG, s.v. σηραζός for the first attestation. Like the novelty of the lexicon used to describe her objects, Chinese silk pillows would have been a mark of extreme luxury. Chinese silk, though well-known in Greece from the fifth century, was very rare even in the first century CE in Rome (Watson 2003, 305).

32 See Craca 1987, 138–52 on Horace’s use of different linguistic registers in this poem as a sign of Hellenistic *poikilia*. See too Schubert 2012, 37, 45.

33 Archilochean and Hipponactean archaic *iambos* both frequently feature hyperbolic descriptions of male sexual acts and male genitalia. Athenaeus (3.122b, 10.447b) records a few examples from Archilochus; all the fragments are collected in Gerber 1999. These include: Archilochus, fr. 43; Scholia gr. ad Hom. *Il.* 9.7; P. Oxy 2312 fr. 14; Scholia ad Euripides, *Med.* 679; Hipponax in *Et. Gen.* lambda 156.

34 Fitzgerald (1988) and Oliensis (1991) above began the discussion of the theme of *impotentia* in the *Epodes*, continued by Gowers (above, note 11), Watson (1995), Henderson (1999), McMahon (1998, 31–4), Oliensis (1998, 73–7), and Barchiesi (2001). Johnson (2012, 40–1) concentrates upon the iambist’s strength.

35 Dimundo (2002, 295–303) gives an overview of the extensive bibliography on the relationship between Horace and Propertius.

36 On Horace’s softening of Roman *iambos* from Archilochus’s genre, see Harrison 2001, 168–72 and Hills 2005, 33–7. The Roman reading of Archilochus long associated him with virulent, aggressive invective, graphic descriptions of sex, and bitter, stinging iambic poetry. See T. Hawkins 2014, 1–8. On Archilochus’s and *iambos*’s legacy, Rotstein 2010 is critical reading.

37 *Mollitia* as an accusation of effeminacy turned against men appears throughout Roman writings. As Edwards (1993, 63–97) makes clear in her seminal discussion, *mollitia* carries a “much broader frame of reference than the specifically sexual” (68) and was also associated with political, social, and moral weakness.

38 Later scholars have expanded upon Leo’s (1900, 9–17) argument, including Barchiesi 1994a, who shows that the cross-genre borrowing goes both ways: Propertius has recognized Horace’s usage of elegiac tropes and *topoi* and used iambic forms in his 1.4 addressed to the iambic poet Bassus (133–4). Heslin (2011, 55–60) supports Barchiesi’s reading of Horatian elements in 1.4 and further suggests that Bassus is likely a metapoetic pseudonym for Horace himself. Luck (1976, 123–6) offers a detailed list of comparisons between *Epode* 11 and Vergil’s Gallus of *Eclogue* 10, along with examples from Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid. On *Epode* 11, see Woodman 2015, 678, who finds a stronger parallel to Catullus 50.4, *scribens versiculos*, than to elegy in Horace’s *scribere versiculos* (*Epod.* 11.2).

39 Leo 1960, vol. 2, 146.

40 This epode not only uses *mollis inertia* in its opening line, but it also speaks to Maecenas’s feelings as “burning” (*urere*), a term Karakasis (2013, 231–4) has called chiefly elegiac in his discussion of Calpurnius Siculus’s generic interaction with love

elegy in *Ecl.* 3. On Horace's shift towards the lyric of his *Odes* in *Epode* 14, see Mankin 1995, 227; Watson 2003, 440; and Harrison 2007, 221.

41 See, e.g., Kennedy 1993, 31–3; Keith 1994 on women in the *Amores*; Keith 1999 on Tibullus in Horace's *Epist.* 1.4 and *Carm.* 1.33; Wray 2003, Nikoloutsos 2011, 34 on Tibullan elegy; and Miller 2004, 137–43 and Greene 2005, 76 on Propertian and Ovidian elegy.

42 See Olson 2014, 184, 187–93 on *mollitia* as sartorially displayed.

43 See Edwards 1993, 63–97; Williams 1999, 125–32; and Skinner 2005, 212.

44 *Epode* 12, furthermore, expands many of *Epode* 8's themes including matching the speaker's self-directed invective with the *mulier's* iambic and embodied response. *Epode* 12 greatly elaborates upon *Epode* 8's bestial imagery for the female body, also turns self-ironic humor against phallic language for the male body, and as in *Epode* 8, the speaker becomes impotent in the face of this mistress.

45 Carrubba 1966, 1 and Kiessling 1958, 519. Watson (2003, 290) cautions that extant Archaic *iambos*, however, does not supply parallels for “either the density, or even the realism of sexual detail” of these *Epodes*. Cf. Barabino 1993/1994, 16. Glinatsis (2013, 165–6) reads the catalogues of body parts insulted as a “veritable style exercise” (“*une hypergénéricité*”) which allows the iambic poetry to be at its most marked, virulent, and misogynistic.

46 Feminist criticism of Roman love elegy has long demonstrated, however, that the topsy-turvy inversions of Roman gendered power structures that the poetic Ego claims for his elegiac world work only to his own advantage, and that despite the elegiac speaker's claims to be a powerless slave of love (*servus amoris*), he continues nevertheless to exert masculine hegemony over the *puella* by means of his persuasion and through threats of violence. See Frederick 1997; Greene 1998; Wyke 2002, 155–88; and James 2003, 184–210.

47 Barabino (1993/1994, 22–6) has demonstrated that many of these animals are linked to hyperbolic sexuality and *luxuria*.

48 See Cavarzere 1992, 195 and Barabino 1993/1994, 22–4 on elephants in Roman literature, and their link to insatiable libido.

49 To have a “goat in the armpit” was a common expression in Latin poetry for strong body odor; cf. Catullus 69.5–8, 71 and Ovid, *Ars am.* 3.193. Goats are also proverbially horny. See Kutzko 2008, 446 and Koenen 1977, 72 note 2 on Rufus in Catullus 69 and 71. See Maleuvre 1995, 67–71 on the influence of Catullus on *Epodes* 8 and 12.

50 Adams 1982, 90–1.

51 See J. N. Hawkins 2014 on *canina eloquentia* in the *Epodes* as a voiceless, but powerful and animalistic, response to the changing trauma of the political climate in triumphal Rome.

52 See also *Epod.* 6.11–2 where Horace is again a bull. The *mulier* deflates the iambist's prior image of the threatening horns of a bull when she mocks the speaker.

53 Johnson (2012, 157–8) also connects the *mulier's* language to the *adynata* of lions and tigers mingling with their prey in *Epod.* 16.31–4.

54 On Horace and Neoteric context, see Romano 1991, 991 and Günther 2013, 177–8.

55 Catullus makes a similar boast in 32.7–8; Propertius boasts of his virility at 2.23.33; and the trope appears in Hellenistic epigram as well (Asclepiades, *Anth. Pal.*

5.181.11–2 and Philodemus, *Anth. Pal.* 11.30). On Ovid’s phallic bragging, Sharrock 1995 is crucial.

56 On clothing as a costly gift given by a lover to his mistress, see Plautus, *Men.* 130, *Asin.* 929, *Truc.* 53, 535–6; Lucretius 4.1130; Propertius 1.2.1–4, 2.1.5–6; Tibullus 2.3.55–62; and James 2003, 84–98. When he sees Aeneas wearing Dido’s gifts, including an expensive lion’s skin dyed with Tyrian murex, Mercury chastises Aeneas as *uxorius* and forgetful of his own mission (*Aen.* 4.261–7).

57 Watson (2003, 410) feels that Lesbia is a procuress’s name, because Lesbian women were known for their sexual talents. Mankin (1995, 211) thinks Lesbia is an epithet for Inachia, who is skilled in “Lesbian acts,” i.e., fellatio.

58 Maleuvre 1995, 70.

59 See *Ecl.* 2.35, 39; 3.66, 74, 83; 5.8, 15, 18; 10.37, 38, 41.

60 On Horace’s relationship with Tibullus’s elegy, see Keith 1999. On the unorthodox masculinity of the elegiac speaker and his response to the temporal pressures of the Augustan life-course, see most recently Gardner 2013, 85–112.

61 See also Barabino 1993/1994, 28 on the narrowly restricted sense of *iners* within erotic language to mean sexually inert or impotent.

62 In Propertian elegy, the term does not carry the same sexual connotations when it is used at 1.8a.10, 2.32.20, and 3.7.72.

63 That *inertia* is a sign of infertility may also look to a characteristically elegiac wordplay. The Ovidian *iners* body evokes the idea of physical *and* poetic infertility, one without *ars*. See Gardner 2013, 89 on Tibullus’s play with poetic artlessness.

64 J. N. Hawkins (2014) provides further context for Horace’s restricted sense of *rabies* as animalistic in *Epode* 12. Her study of *rabies* in the *Epodes* connects Horatian practice to a broader Greek and Roman iambic association with a dog’s rabid rage or to a guard dog which helps friends and harms enemies. *Rabies*, in Hawkins’s reading, is canine: a “barking cure” that is therapeutic against the trauma of the triumviral period.

65 Johnson (2012, 60–1) has connected this passage on the need to restrict Fescanine verse in the Roman world to Archilochus’s Roman reception as a poet of overly-excessive invective.

66 In a similar discussion, Barchiesi (2009, 241–2) notes that iambic poetry “lends itself to a metapoetic reading . . . The aggression of the iambic poets is traditionally explained in terms of *rabies* and *cholos*, melancholy and obsessive anger. To become an iambic poet in antiquity meant to become a danger—to others and possibly to oneself.”

67 Cf. Esler 1989 on Horace’s representation of aging women in the *Epodes* and *Odes*.

68 My interpretation here supplements Clayman’s (1975, 55–60) earlier readings of Horatian *iambos*, where she has argued that the bodies pilloried have been understood as stand-ins for different stylistic traits rejected by Horace. Clayman’s reading of these *Epodes* link Horatian practice to Callimachean iambic in that both use a “potent combination of obscene insult and literary criticism” (1975, 55); see also Barchiesi 1994a. Oliensis (1998, 75) criticizes the limitations of what she terms allegorical readings, remarking: “If Horace is criticizing not only sexual but also literary excesses, the critique has not managed to stay above the mud of its metaphors.”

69 On Roman elegy and rhetorical theory, see Keith 1999, 41 note 4, who lists

some of the analogies between parts of the human body and parts of texts to be found in Roman rhetorical texts, including *corpus*, *membrum*, *caput*, *color*, *candor*, *figura*, *forma*, *latus*, *lumen*, *manus*, *nervus*, *os (oris)*, *os (ossis)*, *pectus*, *pes*, *sanguis*, *vultus*. Further discussion of the metaphor is in Fantham 1972, 164–74. Clayman (1975, 55–60) points out that the *Vetula*'s physique in *Epode* 8 is described in the language used elsewhere for rough, Archaic verse, and for Stoic style (*turpis*, 8.8; *crudus*, 8.6; *aridus*, 8.5; and *exilis*, 8.10).

70 See Farrell 2007 and Freudenburg 1993, 148–51 for a discussion of the ancient tendency to equate Horace's own body with the poetics of his books. On the limitations of using autobiographical elements to interpret the *Satires*, see the fundamental treatments of Zetzel 1980 and Gowers 2003.

71 On Horace's conflation in the *Sermones* of the poet and his poetry, see also *Serm.* 1.10.36–7 on *turgidus Alpinus*; and *Serm.* 2.5.34–41, a passage teasing the Neoteric poet M. Furius Bibaculus. On these passages, see Gowers 2012, 323 and Freudenburg 1993, 103, 191.

72 See also Günther 2013, 151–4, 210.

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