continued from last time: Epode 17 – Plea to Canidia

This is the only non-epodic poem (all the lines are the same length, not in couplets with lines of alternating length) in the *Epodes*.

The first half is the narrator begging Canidia to knock off the curse she’s got on him. (Paraphrase) “Achilles, Circe, Castor and Pollux all showed mercy (because of the words of their victims), so you should too, Canidia, because you’re really great and you don’t do these specific horrible things I mention, and you really do have a son and you never fake childbirth just so you appear virtuous.”

Canidia is unmoved. (Paraphrase) “I can hear you no better than the rocks hear the sailors shipwrecked in a storm. Things are just going to get worse for you; you’re going to wish to die.” She gives some examples of people who were not shown mercy: Tantalus, Prometheus and Sisyphus, who were punished by Jupiter for not conforming to his new laws.

1. Examine the examples each speaker gives. How do the speakers characterize the nature of the crime?
2. What does it mean for Canidia to be a ride on the narrator’s “loathsome” back? Why is it loathsome? What kind of message does that action send?

**Horace: Odes**

**Reading 1: Book 1: 1-10, 13, 14, 16**

The Odes show us a more mature poet than the Epodes did. More mature, and with an assignment from Augustus. Augustan Rome had Vergil as Homer; the lyric poet Alcaeus fell to Horace (Sappho, Anacreon and Pindar are others).

The poems, often addressed to some “you,” are balanced to vary in meter, tone (high style, light style etc.) and content (political, private etc.), much like the Hellenistic poets (3rd-2nd century Greeks like Callimachus) did.

A few themes recur throughout the *Odes*.
- landscapes: pleasant Italian countryside depicting a simple rustic life, or wild and harsh “Dionysian” countryside untamed by man, or private space in which the poet works;
- friendship;
- the poetic calling (inspired by the Muses, Mercury, Bacchus or Apollo).

The first three books of *Odes* were published in 23 BC.

**Ode 1.1 – The varieties of Roman experience**

The first of the “Parade Odes,” the nine poems that start of book one, because they “give a fair sample ... of the range of [Horace’s] subject matter and style...” (West, p
xiv), is addressed to Maecenas and sets the tone as cheerful, serious and observant of people and state, but lacking any loftiness or sense of self-importance. Horace sets out nine different ways of life, including his own, all with a sense of humor.

1. What are the nine “ways of life”?

The “lyre of Lesbos” refers to both Sappho and Alcaeus, both lyric poets who lived on the island Lesbos. (The genre is so called because the poet would strum the lyre, a stringed instrument, while reciting the poetry.)

**Ode 1.2 – Augustus’ position in the line from Aeneas**

In this poem, Horace uses a flood of the Tiber as a thematic element tying the present day Iulius back to his mythological roots. The Tiber overflows his banks because his wife Ilia, the daughter of Numa, the (legendary) second king of Rome who established the religious practices and the position of Pontifex Maximus (one of Caesar’s titles), in the line of Aeneas, was raped by Mars. This rape brought about Romulus and Remus, synonymous with civil war (which preceded Julius Caesar’s assassination in 44 BC and went through the battle of Actium in 31 BC). West’s note tells us this section alludes to the portents before the assassination of Julius Caesar; Horace’s wish is that the same portents won’t come before the same end.

Stanza 6: “Young men will hear... -- what few of them there are, thanks to the sins of their fathers...” The battle of Actium saw huge numbers killed: 2500 from Octavian’s army, 5000 from Antony and Cleopatra’s.

Horace ends the poem with a request for a god: Apollo, Venus, Mars or Mercury/Augustus to cleanse the Romans of their sin of civil war and not to take Augustus away too soon, and also to go get those Parthians (Medes/Persians lines 22, 51).

**Ode 1.3 – Sail safe, sweet Vergil**

This is one of the few Odes not addressed to a person. It is, instead, addressed to the ship upon which Vergil, “half of my soul,” is sailing. It is a prayer for good winds and safekeeping for Vergil.

1. What kind of guy was the first sailor? Who is he compared to?
2. What is the final message about humans, challenges and civil war (Jupiter’s thunderbolts, as the note tells us, are associated with civil war)?
Ode 1.4 – Spring’s beautiful, but death’s always lurking
1. Do you think the tone of this poem is kind or threatening?

Ode 1.5 – Goodbye, love songs
Pyrrha, a heartbreaker, is a calm sea now, but will not stay so. Horace, however, has retired from her. This is the most famous of Horace’s odes (according to the note in the back).

Ode 1.6 – Two praises in one
In this poem, Horace says that Varius, a friend and another writer in the employ of Maecenas, should praise the general Agrippa (and Augustus) because Agrippa and Augustus are epic guys, and Horace is but a love poet. In the fourth stanza, though, Horace goes on to show that he can actually do it pretty well before moving on to his preferred topics: drinking parties and love, with cheer. This form of double praise (and self-deprecation) is a poetic form called *recusatio*.

Ode 1.7 – There are those...
There are a lot of places that people praise, but Horace praises a little town in the hills about 25 miles east of Rome (perhaps where Plancus, the addressee had a villa). Plancus, formerly a governor in Asia Minor who supported Antony until he joined Octavian’s side at the battle of Actium, would do well to drink and be merry in that beautiful place for a while. This poem, like number 4 (above) to Sestius, portrays themes of clemency and reconciliation typical of the Augustus as he “made Rome whole again.”

Ode 1.8 – What have you done to Sybaris, woman?
Addressed to Lydia, about why she’s ruining a good soldier.

Ode 1.9 – Baby, it’s cold outside
Look at that snowy mountain. The trees can barely stand, the rivers are flooded. Horace tells Thaliarchus, his boy slave/lover (in Greek fashion) to put another log on the fire and pour the wine generously and live for the day (Horace coined the phrase “carpe diem” in this book of odes, poem 11).

Ode 1.9 concludes the “Parade Odes.”

Ode 1.10 – Mercury, you’re awesome
1. What’s so awesome about Mercury?

Ode 1.13 – Don’t tell me about him
1. Why does Horace not want to hear about Telephus?
2. Can you make any sense of that last stanza?

Ode 1.14 – Ship = State
This is one of few poems addressed to an inanimate object: a ship. Read this poem thinking of the ship as a metaphor for Rome.
1. What could it mean for the ship (Rome) to be carried out to sea? to head for the harbor? to have its side stripped of oars? What do the images, like the wind battering the mast, depict?

**Ode 1.16 – I take it all back**

Horace apologizes for some harsh poetry. He says he was angry. Anger is more powerful than the gods, and it can’t be controlled by sharp swords or the sea or fire. Prometheus is possibly the cause of it all, and anger’s what doomed Thyestes and what allowed Achilles to destroy Troy.

Which of these poems is your favorite? What do you like about it? If there is one (or more!) you hate, mark that too, so you can tell us.