

AN INTERPRETATION OF HORACE, *EPODES* 13¹

THE Thirteenth Epode is an intriguing poem. Like *Carm.* 1. 7 it concludes dramatically with a highly condensed episode from epic tradition, in this case drawn from the early life of Achilles; but, unlike the Ode to Plancus, *Epodes* 13 does not reveal even the name of the addressee. And whether in spite of or because of this, the poem has been highly praised for its purely lyrical qualities. The now famous critique of E. Fraenkel, for example, represents the view of many: 'A perfect poem,' he calls it; '... its depth of feeling and beauty of expression and the harmonious blending of ideas of very different origin, make this ode superior to *Odes* 1. 7.'² The general approval of its poetic qualities might encourage a fresh attempt to discover any deeper significance it might have held for Horace's contemporaries.

The epode begins, appropriately, in an Archilochean manner, in the midst of an angry storm:

Horrida tempestas caelum contraxit et imbres
nivesque deducunt Iovem; nunc mare nunc siluae
Threicio Aquilone sonant.

It has been suggested that this vivid storm is deliberately symbolic of the *dirae sollicitudines* (10).³ We know that a very similar passage of Archilochus was considered in antiquity to be allegorical:

Γλαῦχ' ὄρα. βάθος γὰρ ἤδη κύμασιν ταρασσεται
πόντος, ἀμφὶ δ' ἄκρα Γυρέων ὀρθὸν ἵσταται νέφος,
σημα χειμῶνος. κιχάνει δ' ἐξ ἀελπίτης φόβος.⁴

Some critics, such as Stroux, have sensed that in *Epod.* 13 this is more than just a *topos*: that Horace, like Archilochus, is comparing a real situation, perhaps a real war, to the violent storm outside, bringing *φόβος ἐξ ἀελπίτης*.⁵

But the nature of these *dirae sollicitudines* constitute only one of a number of problems of interpretation. What is the setting? Who are present? Horace

¹ This article is based upon Chapter III of my doctoral dissertation, "MUSIS AMICUS UNICE SECURUS: A Study of Consolation in the *Odes* of Horace" (Diss. Yale, 1967). I would like to express my thanks especially to A. Astin, G. S. Kirk, R. MacMullen, E. T. Silk, and C. B. Welles, who have read it in typescript and given it much penetrating criticism. Such flaws as remain are my responsibility alone.

² *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), 65-6; cf. Reitzenstein, 'Horaz und die hellenistische Lyrik', *NJb* xxi (1908), 85; and J. Stroux, 'Valerius Flaccus und Horaz', *Phil.* xc (1935), 324.

³ See Stroux, loc. cit. 226-7; and Heinze (ad loc.) on *diris*.

⁴ Frag. 56(D). Ps.-Heraclitus comments as follows: Ἀρχίλοχος ἐν τοῖς Θρακικοῖς ἀπειλημμένος δεινοῖς τὸν πόλεμον εἰκάζει θαλαττίῳ κλύδωνι (*alleg. Hom.* 5, p. 6 ed. Bonn.). Whether Horace's description of the storm is conventional or real, his facts seem to be accurate: 'Vorias (der alte Boreas) . . . ist der kühle, oft stürmische Nordwind (NW, N, NO), der im Sommer Trockenheit, in der Regenzeit oft kalten Regen und Schnee bringt.' (A. Philippson, *Das Mittelmeergebiet* [Leipzig, 1907], 99). L. P. Wilkinson (*Horace and his Lyric Poetry* [Camb., 1945], 128, n. 2) refers to the ἄνεμος βορέας of Alcaeus, Frag. B6 (L-P), in terms of a political storm.

⁵ Loc. cit., 324-5.

proceeds with an exhortation to wine and fellowship addressed to the whole group:

rapiamus amici
occasionem de die, dumque virent genua
et decet, obducta solvatur fronte senectus (3b-5).¹

Then he singles out one individual: *tu* (6). We may be able to draw some inferences about these unnamed individuals. Horace would not likely address the greater part of the poem to someone not an *amicus* after beginning with *amici* (at least not without some vocative, such as *puer*). The exhortation 'tu vina Torquato move consule pressa meo' (6) should be addressed to the host; that it was proper etiquette for a guest to specify the vintage to his host is confirmed by *Carm.* 3. 21. 5-8:

quocumque lectum nomine Massicum
servas, moveri digna bono die
descende, *Corvino iubente*
promere languidiora vina.

The language that follows is reminiscent of many of the *Odes*:

cetera mitte loqui: deus haec fortasse benigna
reducet in sedem vice, nunc et Achaemenio
perfundi nardo iuvat et fide Cyllenaea
levare diris pectora sollicitudinibus (7-10).

And yet there is a mood of immediacy and dire apprehension that the *Odes* seldom achieve. Interesting is the antithetical placing of *tu* and *meo* in 6.² The motif of the mutability of fortune is usually only a *topos*,³ but here it seems a pressing reality. On the pregnant and pathetic *fortasse* (7) Heinze comments: 'dies "vielleicht" ist sehr ausdrucksvoll: es liegt darin "wenn nicht, so soll uns das jetzt auch nicht kümmern; wir werden's ertragen".'

The remainder of the epode parallels the close of *Carm.* 1. 7, introducing a myth as the *exemplum*, in the form of an extended simile (11-18):⁴

nobilis ut grandi cecinit Centaurus alumno
'invicte, mortalis dea nate puer Thetide,
te manet Assaraci tellus, quam frigida parvi
findunt Scamandri flumina lubricus et Simois;

¹ The expression *occasionem de die* (4) seems unparalleled. The closest Horace comes to repeating it is *partem solido de die* (*Carm.* 1. 1. 20), where *de die* is definitely partitive and generalizing. But the context here seems to imply source rather than partition, and specific time (the present), i.e. 'Let us seize the occasion the day presents'. The occasion could be represented by *dies* in a number of senses: *sacer*, *bonus*, *festus*, *meus* (i.e. birthday). *Dies* may also take the sense of weather: *tranquillus*, *aprica*, *pestilens*. Is the stormy weather itself offering the excuse for a party? For (*dies*) *meus* = *fatalis*, see Tac. *Dial.* 13.

² Naylor interprets *meo*: 'my own, my loved, because I was born in his consulship'. N. compares 1. 26. 8 and 1. 13. 5. where *meum* provides the contrast to *Telephi* (2). The *tu . . . meo* contrast seems plain, although N. omits to mention it.

³ See Stroux, loc. cit. 326.

⁴ The technique is reminiscent of Pindar; and the theme of Catullus, but the details may be Horace's own invention. See E. L. Highbarger, 'The Pindaric Style of Horace,' *TAPA*, lxvi (1935), 227-8 on *Pyth.* 3 and *Nem.* 3. For the prophecy of Achilles' exploits, cf. Catull. 64. 338-81.

unde tibi reditum certo subtemine Parcae
 rupere, nec mater domum caerulea te revehet.
 illic omne malum vino cantuque levato,
 deformis aegrimoniae dulcibus alloquiiis.¹

To determine what function this Achilles *exemplum* fulfills, and how it is to be a source of consolation to the host, we must examine its details and try to relate the advice Chiron gives the hero to that given by the speaker in the epode (Horace). First of all, the choice of Achilles must be construed as a compliment to the nameless addressee. The scene is the poignant farewell between Achilles and his tutor; the former is now of age (*grandis alumnus*) to leave the Centaur, just as Jason had done a generation earlier on his twenty-first birthday.¹ The last line gathers up the thought of the whole poem by recalling its basic antitheses: storm outside . . . good cheer within; wine and song . . . anxieties; the future sufferings of Achilles . . . the kindly advice of the Centaur.

To suppose that *Epod.* 13 represents a real occasion we would be faced with another problem as well as that of its identification: why are the characters and setting not made clearer? It may be that a solution to the main question will provide an answer to the second. Such a solution would have to fit the details Horace does give, including those which appear to be merely conventional, showing especially the appropriateness of the Achilles–Chiron episode as Horace develops it. Any major inconsistencies would have to be considered as fatal to the argument, as they would make a hypothesis unprovable, at best. And if Horace is not assumed to be speaking *propria persona* we have no basis for speculation. Therefore the situation for which we require a real counterpart is as follows. The poet is a guest among equals (*amici*) at a symposium, against the background of a wintry storm. Outside the Thracian north wind is making the woods and sea (in sight or earshot?) roar. These men are young (3–5) and are exhorted to seize the opportunity that the *dies* affords, possibly in terms of the weather or a birthday party. But then Horace turns to the host whose own dire depression is in tune with the weather outside and tells him to forget everything else (7), and raise his spirits with wine and music; in the meantime his luck may turn. Finally the poet likens his advice (and possibly the circumstances under which he gives it) to the parting admonition of Chiron to Achilles, now of age to leave his tutelage. Chiron predicts his ward's coming death at Troy, and counsels him to ease the melancholy this foreknowledge will bring with wine and music. It would be most natural for the nameless host whom Horace compliments with the Achilles *exemplum* to be a soldier, about to face ill-fated battle in a land far from home. If the company at the symposium were soldiers, the theme that most of Porphyrio's MSS. suggest for the poem could be somehow appropriate: *hortatur contubernales*.

There is one historical occasion that fits the details of *Epod.* 13 with exactness that must be more than coincidental: the battle of Philippi. The setting I suggest for the poem is the quarters of Gaius Cassius Longinus on the eve of the first battle; that is, 2 October 42 B.C.² The intimate details of what was

¹ Pind. *Pyth.* 4. 104–7.

² Chronological and emotional associations of this poem with Philippi have long been suspected. See E. Castorina, *La Poesia d'Orazio* (Roma, 1965), 109 f. for discussion

and bibliography.

The date of Brutus' death in the second battle of Philippi has been established from the fragments of the Calendar of Praeneste (see *L'ann. ép.* [1922], 96) by C. Hülsen

said and done that night are given by Plutarch in his *Life of Brutus*, who quotes as his source the eye-witness account of a man who was a close friend of both Cassius and Horace, M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, later to be the real addressee of a very similar poem, *Carm.* 3. 21 (*o nata mecum*). We know from Tacitus (*Ann.* 4. 34) that his memoirs were full of praise for Cassius, and that Augustus had no objections to them:

Scipionem, Afranium, hunc ipsum Cassium, hunc Brutum nusquam latrones et parricidas, quae nunc vocabula imponuntur, saepe ut insignis viros nominat. Asinii Pollionis scripta egregiam eorumdem memoriam tradunt; Messala Corvinus imperatorem suum Cassium praedicabat; et uterque opibusque atque honoribus perviguere.

The details Plutarch repeats are often very enlightening. For example, we learn that after the famous quarrel at Sardis Cassius had given a dinner to which Brutus invited his friends. At this dinner the conversation was pleasant and philosophical (*Brut.* 34. 4): *καὶ παιδιὰν ὁ πότος ἔσχεν οὐκ ἄχαριν οὐδὲ ἀφιλόσοφον*. Should we seriously doubt that Horace, a *tribunus* of Brutus, could have been there?¹

About the eve of Philippi, too, there is much detail given. We know, for instance, that one of Brutus' aides, a certain Atillius, made Cassius furious by giving as a reason for delaying battle until spring, that he would live longer (*Brut.* 39. 6)! According to Plutarch, Brutus was in hopeful spirits, and entertained in his quarters (40); but Cassius was withdrawn and silent at dinner, which he took in his own quarters with only a few kindred spirits:

Κάσιον δὲ Μεσσάλας φησὶ δειπνῆν τε καθ' ἑαυτὸν ὀλίγους τῶν συνήθων παραλαβόντα, καὶ σύννουν ὁρᾶσθαι καὶ σιωπηλόν, οὐ φύσει τοιοῦτον ὄντα.

Notice that Plutarch here specifically attributes his information to Messalla; and apparently Messalla was one of this small group, because Cassius spoke to him warmly as they broke up:

('Zum Kalender der Arvalbrüder: Das Datum der Schlacht bei Philippi', *Strena Buliciana* [Zagreb/Split, 1924], 193-7) as 23 October. The insoluble contradiction between this evidence and that of Suetonius (*Tib.* 5) is discussed by G. Wissowa in *Hermes* lviii (1923), 372 ff. (Suet. says that the *fasti actaque publica* record Tiberius as having been born on 16 November *per bellum Philippense*.) T. Rice Holmes (*The Architect of the Roman Empire* [Oxford, 1928], p. 85) dates Brutus' death on 16 November on the evidence of Suetonius, although he cites *The Year's Work in Classical Studies* for 1922 and 1923-4, which allude only to 'Oct. 23 as the date of Philippi'. R. Syme, (*The Roman Revolution* [Oxford, 1939], p. 205) speaks of the first battle as belonging to 23 October although he cites Hülsen. E. Fraenkel (pp. 11, 53) places the second battle in mid November. M. P. Charlesworth (*C.A.H.* x [1934], 24) is convinced of the dating of the second battle on 23 October.

The date of Philippi I does not affect the

argument here since it is definitely autumn; and the weather would be appropriate to the details that Plutarch (*Brut.* 47. 1) gives. However, because of the uncertainty of the text and interpretation of *per bellum Philippense* (Suet. *Tib.* 5), as well as the range of possible dates Suetonius does give for Tiberius' birth, I favor Hülsen's date. Thus the first battle (and hence Cassius' birthday [Plut. *Brut.* 39. 3]) would fall twenty days earlier (*ibid.* 47), on approximately 3 October 42 B.C.

There seems to be no reason to doubt that Plutarch's major source for the events before, during, and after Philippi was Messalla Corvinus. See C. Wickmann, *De Plutarchi in vitis Bruti et Antonii fontibus* (Bonn, 1874); H. Peter, *Die Quellen Plutarchs in den Biographien der Römer* (Bonn, 1865); A. Heeren, *De fontibus et auctoritate vitarum parallelarum Plutarchi* (Göttingen, 1820). Plutarch cites Messalla by name seven times in all.

¹ *Sat.* 1. 6. 48.

Μαρτύρομαί σε, Μεσσάλα, ταῦτ' Ἀπομνήϊω Μάγων πάσχειν, ἀναγκαζόμενος
διὰ μᾶς μάχης ἀναρρῆσαι τὸν περὶ τῆς πατρίδος κύβον.

If the *tu* of *Epod.* 13 is Cassius, the reasons for his *dirae sollicitudines* are clear. He seems to have known, as the better soldier of the two generals, that the timing would be fatal; but he was ready (like Achilles) to accept his fate without complaint.

And Cassius' last words to Messalla here seem to illustrate some brave optimism about Fortune too, reminiscent of 7-8:

ἀγαθὴν μέντοι ψυχὴν ἔχωμεν εἰς τὴν τύχην ἀφορῶντες, ἦ, κὰν βουλευσώμεθα
κακῶς, ἀπιστεῖν οὐ δίκαιον.

And yet this was in spite of oddly superstitious forebodings that seized the troops in general, and were undermining his well-known Epicurean beliefs (*Brut.* 39. 3):

οἱ μάντις ἀφοσιούμενοι τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν ἄτρεμα καὶ τὸν Κάσιον αὐτὸν
ὑποφέρουσιν ἐκ τῶν Ἐπικούρου λόγων, τοὺς δὲ στρατιώτας παντάπασι δεδουλω-
μένην.

Then with a dramatic irony that Plutarch could not resist, Cassius had invited Messalla to a birthday celebration the next day:

ταῦτα εἰπόντα φησὶν ὁ Μεσσάλας τελευταία πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀσπάσασθαι τὸν
Κάσιον· εἶναι δὲ κεκλημμένος εἰς τὴν ὑστεραίαν ἐπὶ δεῖπνον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γενέθλιον
οὔσαν.

The probability of Horace's having been present at this highly select gathering we shall leave for the moment. Let us only assume that he was familiar enough with Messalla's account of it to have been able to use it as the subject of *Epod.* 13. This is highly probable, even if Messalla had not published his memoirs at the time when Horace composed the poem. But do the details of the poem square with Messalla's (i.e. the Plutarch-Appian) version?

As far as the weather is concerned, it would seem appropriate enough to eastern Macedonia in October. But even without the meteorological reports of the region to see how the *Threïcius Aquilo* behaves in the autumn, we can again consult Plutarch. If Messalla described the weather at Philippi the day *before* the battle, Plutarch has not repeated the information; but he does make much of the fearful weather conditions that were working against Octavian and Antony during the lull between the first and second battle (*Brut.* 47. 1):

Οὐδὲν δὲ βέλτιον εἶχε τὰ πράγματα τοῖς περὶ Καίσαρα καὶ Ἀντώνιον, ἀγορᾷ τε
χρωμένοις ἀναγκαῖα καὶ διὰ κοιλότητα τοῦ στρατοπέδου χειμῶνα μοχθηρὸν προσ-
δοκῶσιν. εἰλούμενοι γὰρ πρὸς ἔλεσι καὶ μετὰ τὴν μάχην ὄμβρων φθινοπωρινῶν
ἐπιγιγνομένων πηλοῦ κατεπίμπλαντο τὰς σκηνὰς καὶ ὕδατος παραχρῆμα πηγνυ-
μένοι διὰ ψύχους.

The sound of the wind from the forest and the sea in the eode (2) seems much like any other storm in Horace (e.g. *Carm.* 1. 9); but is this description not particularly appropriate to the suggested setting? Appian (4. 13) gives a detailed description of the topography of Philippi (also from Messalla?),

which is on the top of a high hill, with woods on the north and a marsh stretching to the coast on the south:

ἔχει δὲ πρὸς μὲν ἄρκτω δρύμους, δι' ὧν ὁ 'Ρασκούπολις ἤγαγε τοὺς ἀμφὶ τὸν Βροῦτον· πρὸς δὲ τῇ μεσημβρίᾳ ἔλος ἔστι καὶ θάλασσα μετ' αὐτό.

The season, topography, weather conditions, even the date, all seem to fit.

This setting might also help to explain the curious phrase *occasionem de die* (4) and the references to youth and age, if Horace is thinking of the symposium as the closest thing Cassius actually had to a birthday celebration. If the emphatic *tu* (6) is Cassius, the host, then Horace's urging of a mellow old vintage (cf. *languidiora*: 3. 21. 8) to soothe his forebodings is both sensible and fitting: he recommends wine bottled when he himself was born to the host on *his* birthday.¹ And is it merely coincidence that the parting conversation between Chiron and Achilles might be taking place conventionally on *Achilles'* birthday?

It would then be clear what the *dirae sollicitudines* of the host would be. 'Deus haec fortasse benigna / reducet in sedem vice' corresponds exactly to Cassius' last word of the occasion as reported by Messalla: ἀγαθὴν μέντοι ψυχὴν ἔχωμεν εἰς τὴν τύχην ἐφορῶντες, ἥ, κἂν βουλευσώμεθα κακῶς, ἀπιστεῖν οὐ δίκαιον. These words reveal a sensitivity to Fortune's power that is distinctly Roman, but reminiscent, as well, of the fatalism of Achilles (*Il.* 18. 120–1):

ὥς καὶ ἐγών, εἰ δὴ μοι ὁμοίῃ μοῖρα τέτυκται,
κείσομ', ἐπεὶ κε θάνω· νῦν δὲ κλέος ἐσθλὸν ἀροίμην.

This interpretation would give a real significance to the *topos* of *Achaemenium nardum* as well; for Brutus and Cassius had left Asia bringing much of its wealth with them.² Such a commodity might well be in abundance, and thus really not the extravagance it represents in *Carm.* 3. 1.

As far as the Achilles-tale is concerned, the parallels to the tragic tale of Cassius, who seems to have allowed the pattern of events to develop against his will, are clear enough. That the highly formalized poetic description of the Trojan rivers might represent the scene at Philippi is appropriate: rivers and marshes (to judge from Appian) seem to have dominated the landscape from the Strymon to the sea, including the stream that served as a moat for the Republicans' defence works (4. 106). If there is a connection, then the gloss that Ps.-Acro preserves on *lubricus* ('*limosus*') seems even more attractive.³

The coincidences between the poem itself and the events, personalities, and impressions of the hours that preceded the battle of Philippi, so vivid in the poet's memory, are much too extensive to ignore. It is a setting and occasion that Horace's contemporaries might recognize from personal experience or eye-witness accounts such as Messalla's—or Horace's. That the poet was at Philippi as a *tribunus* of Brutus is as certain a historical fact as anything about his life can be. That he was one of Cassius' small congenial gathering the night before the battle (in view of his temperament, his Epicurean interests, and his friendship with Cassius' second-in-command, Messalla) is quite probable.⁴ If

¹ Interesting too is this tradition (Sen. *Ep.* 83. 12): *Cassius tota vita aquam bibit.*

² αὐτοὶ μὲν ἔχοντες Ἀσίαν χορηγὸν καὶ ἐξ ἐγγίονος πάντα διὰ θαλάσσης ποριζόμενοι (App. 4. 108).

³ For the use of both *limosus* and *lubricus*

to refer to a marshy battlefield, see Tac. *Ann.* 1. 65: *lubrico paludum . . . limosa humo.*

⁴ Appian (4. 105–6) tells us that the camps of Brutus and Cassius were located on adjoining hills, eight stades apart. The space between was fortified by a rampart with a

Horace was motivated to write three poems about the battle of Actium,¹ at which he was probably not present, it is reasonable to expect that he would have left *some* serious record of a comparable event, the horrors of which he had survived, to balance and give perspective to the rather flippant remarks in his other works. And since he did dedicate at least one other poem to Messalla (*Carm.* 3. 21), what greater compliment could he have bestowed upon that comrade of his and Cassius than a fine lyric poem commemorating in a highly personal way the last hours of a great Roman? This is what *Epod.* 13 may represent: an occasion that had left an indelible impression on the poet-soldier's mind, which he depicted with a personal and tragic intensity that was to pass with the *Epodes* and his youth. As such this epode is highly Archilochean in both form and theme: that soldier-poet had also campaigned ἐν τοῖς Θρακικοῖς ἀπειλημένος δεινοῖς, where he had thrown his shield away, too!² Perhaps this echo would have offered a clue to his contemporaries.

What Horace's motive might have been in keeping the addressee anonymous is only vaguely discernible. Sentiments against Cassius may have run higher than against Brutus in the years following Philippi, deciding the poet to include only a single veiled tribute to him: but one that was there for those who cared to find it, especially a warm friend who had shared the events and was to recount them later himself—Messalla Corvinus.

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central gate, so that the two camps were essentially one: ὡς ἐν εἶναι τὰ δύο στρατόπεδα.

¹ *Epod.* 1, 9; *Carm.* 1. 37. See Fraenkel on *Epod.* 9 for the present state of that controversy (op. cit. 71 ff.).

² Cf. *Carm.* 2. 7. 10, and Arch. Frag. 6(D).

Unhappy memories of the island of Thasos, where the Republican leaders fled after the second battle (App. 4. 136; 5. 2) and where the body of Cassius was taken (Plut. *Brut.* 44), may provide another common bond between the two poets. See Arch. Frags. 18, 19, 54(D).