THE TECHNIQUE OF THE DOUBLE STRUCTURE IN HORACE

BY

R. W. CARRUBBA

Zielinski once aptly observed, “Pourquoi le poète s’est-il imposé cette régularité gênante, que le lecteur n’aperçoit qu’après un compte pénible? Nous ne pouvons le dire, mais puisqu’elle est évidente, il faut bien la reconnaître” 1). I do not here intend to attempt to answer Zielinski’s question. Rather, I wish to demonstrate just how intricate Horace’s structures can be. In both epode 4 and epode 6 the major structural pattern is really clear enough to follow with only modest assistance. However, both poems, when carefully examined, reveal the subtle employment of a secondary structure of balance, echo and contrast to the extent that even the seasoned reader of Horace is left somewhat bewildered at the poet’s architectural control. Let us, taking epodes 4 and 6, see just how Horace employs this technique of the double structure.

Epode four is a strange and deceptive composition. If one is prepared to believe that Horace was himself a Roman knight 2), and since in any case we know that he was a tribunus militum 3), the attack on an ex-slave now become a knight and a military tribune is strange. It is all well and good to argue that Horace is attacking the contradiction of the man’s lawless and servile past and his current pretensions, but change of civic status and the military position are too coincidental to make the reader altogether comfortable with the person of Horace launching the attack.

1) T. Zielinski, L’envoûtement de la sorcière chez Horace, in Mélanges Navarre (Toulouse 1935), 439-451. His reference was to the structural symmetry of epode 5.

2) See L. R. Taylor, Horace’s Equestrian Career, AJP 46 (1925), 161-169, whose arguments are substantial. The question was again reviewed by A. Noirfalise, Horace, Chevalier Romain, LEC 18 (1950), 16-21. He concludes that, “...notre poète fut et resta chevalier”.

3) Sat. I 6, 48.
Structurally, the epode is deceptive, for it falls into two easily discernible and equal parts. In lines 1-10, Horace addresses his indignation to the upstart and in lines 11-20, a chorus 1) of Roman men-on-the-street voice the same but to one another. In 1-2, Horace launches the frontal attack with a comparison whose point is reinforced by the parallelism of word order and placement: *lupis et agnis...obtigit* (1) and *tecum mihi...est* (2). The next two lines (3-4) give the first objection Horace has and it is only a hint of what is to come. The person in question is a slave and a lawless one, for he has been scourged and chained. 5-6 tell us more; the slave is in fact an ex-slave who struts about arrogant in his (newly acquired) wealth, but Horace is quick to remind him that prosperity cannot change his servile stock. For confirmation, the poet invites our parvenu to observe the *liberrima indignatio* of the Roman men-on-the-street evoked by his pompous “pacing off” of the Via Sacra dressed in an extravagantly full toga (7-10).

II then allows the chorus of Romans to echo Horace’s objections. We first hear them complain of the man’s lawless servile status (11-12) as contrasted with his present wealth (13) and his ostentations frequenting of the Appian Way with his expensive ponies (14) 2). And that is not all, for he has also become a knight, a *magnus* (ironic) *eques*, who sits in the first rows at the theatre. Surely, Otho’s law, which reserved the first fourteen rows for the knights, was passed with no expectation of a freedman attaining the status of knight 3). The *Othone contempto* then concludes this section with a note of the defiance of the law, the same as the first objection raised by Horace (3-4) and the first raised by the chorus (11-12).

Lines 17-20 I consider a political addendum (not in the sense

---

1) E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957), 58: “With a felicitous stroke he concludes the poem by making us listen to the comments of the populus. Exactly half of the epode is occupied by the talk of the chorus”. The bipartite division is also noted by C. Giarratano, *Il libro degli Epodi* (Torino 1930), 42.

2) As Porphyrin’s note suggests, we are taking the parvenu’s route from his estate to Rome: *Proprie, quia Falerni agri meminerat, quo scilicet Appia necesse est ire.*