

Early in *Epistles* 1.1, Horace exclaims that he is through with poetry (*nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono*, 10). Instead, he will spend his time questioning what is right and appropriate (*verum atque decens*, 11), and he will organize and arrange such material to draw upon it for future benefit (*condo et compono quae mox depromere possim*, 12). The book of epistles is that material (Moles, 2002) and, in the twists and turns of its twenty poems (which should be read together as a complete book), we find Horace struggling to come to a coherent poetics that can unite the epistolary and ethical impulses of this work (Freudenburg, 2002). In this paper, I examine passages from Horace's first book of *Epistles* in which ambiguity between poetic and ethical language gives us a more inclusive view of Horace's contradictory epistolary personae (one thinks of Walt Whitman's, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.").

Horace's own poetic outlook oscillates in the *Epistles* as he shows various facets of his character through these letters to friends and members of the Roman elite. The figurative language, physical setting, philosophical maxims, and fables both communicate the "message" of the poems, and reflect the poetics of the *Epistles*, much like the polished dishes of Horace's quaint dinner party will show Torquatus his own reflection (*ostendat tibi te*, 1.5.25). Horace searches for moderation befitting one of his age and status, but finds himself continually in a state of flux and mirroring the inconsistency of his correspondents (*Ep.* 1.1.97-100; 1.8.3-12; 1.14.40-44). Even his relationship with Maecenas is questioned and examined, and the final lines of *Ep.* 1.7, hint at the need for one to measure oneself according to a personal standard (*metiri se quemque suo modulo ac pede verum est*, 98; cf. 1.1.11 *supra*).

The final two poems of the collection self-consciously reflect on Horace's position as a famous poet in Rome and the imagery and self-description point to the unity of ethical and poetic language. *Ep.* 1.19 stresses his self-confidence (*qui sibi fidet, / dux reget examen*, 22-3; cf. *fidis*, 44), while pointing out that even with such a position, trouble can occur (*ludus enim genuit trepidum certamen et iram, / ira truces inimicitias et funebre bellum*, 48-9). This language ties the poem back to the first two of the collection (through the use of *ludus* and *ira*), and shows that Horace suffers from the same inconsistency that marked those early poems. In the final poem, Horace comes to terms with such contradictions and this personification of the book and his *sphragis* (19-28) recalls imagery and language from the collection as a whole to unite the strands of self-criticism, poetics, and moral encouragement (Mayer, 1994; Percy, 1994). He has created a work that reflects himself (cf. the *tenuis vulpecula* of 1.7.29), and the manner in which he was raised (*in tenui re*, 20). While he still suffers from a quick temper (25), he can also attain the peace and quiet that he praises throughout the first book (*placabilis*, 25), which may or may not involve the reception of his poetry (cf. *placere*, 1.19.2; *placuisse*, 1.20.23).