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The creative superiority of self-reproach: Horace's *Ars Poetica*¹

Victoria Rimell

*carmen reprehendite quod non / multa dies et multa litura coercuit (AP.292-3)**turpem putat...metuitque lituram (Epist.2.1.167)*

[*Premise: delete as appropriate.* In this reading, I consider how the speaker of the *Ars Poetica* constantly keeps in tension a potentially explosive balance between Horace's own inferior social status and superior status as older, quasi-paternal expert who reinforces or threatens to usurp father Piso's authority, and between the superior social status and inferior age/expertise of the young Pisones, as both parties (poet and readers-critics) interact in this 'uneven',² 'unstable'³ and self-transforming⁴ poem. I attempt to harness and draw out what Ellen Oliensis calls the 'extremely volatile blend of authority and deference'⁵ which makes the *AP* flicker with risk, daring, and with the live energy of power relations in practice as they undergo multiple potential permutations. At several points, Horace offers his readers the image or threat (already familiar from the *Satires*) of ridiculing laughter bursting out of not-quite-regulated bodies (v.5 *risum*, v.105 *aut ridebo*, v.113 *cachinnum*, v.356 *ridetur*, v.358 *risu*, v.381 *risum*, v.452 *derisum*) and my aim here is to convey in as much detail as curtailed space permits what it is to read a poem that relies on, or baits, decorous readers to keep its latent wildness under control. I therefore aim to expand Oliensis' construal of the *AP* in terms of Foucauldian self-fashioning,⁶ drawing on late-twentieth century responses to Austin, Foucault and Bourdieu, especially in the work of Judith Butler on censorship.⁷ Key here are three interrelated notions, developed in Butler 1997 and 1998: a) that (self-)censorship is not simply an oppressive prohibition exerted upon uttered speech, but is a necessary way of producing meaningful speech, and is a pre-condition both of any text's intelligibility and of the agency of those considered to be civic subjects—while at the same time also marking the limits of that agency, and giving the lie to the ideal of the sovereign speaking subject who has absolute power over his own speech; b) that censorship necessarily propagates the very language it seeks to forbid: in order to declare that something lies outside the boundaries of admissible speech, that something must be cited, a truth we encounter in the first lines of the *AP*; and c) that censoring a text is always to varying extents incomplete, because the censor can never perfectly anticipate or harness all the possible ways a text can signify: Butler calls this the 'excessive dimension' of speech, and it is the challenge of this dimension, I argue, that Horace's poem on what is and is not acceptable artistic expression pushes us to debate. To make any kind of critical claim about this provocative work is to have one's abilities, politics and

¹ I dedicate this essay to John Henderson, my best teacher, whose voice ~~inevitably pervades~~ I intentionally channel here. Sincere thanks also to Basil Dufallo, for encouragement and admonitions.

² Hardie (2014) 48.

³ Hajdu (2014) 85.

⁴ Hardie (2014) 54.

⁵ Oliensis (1998) 198. However Oliensis flattens discussion on the first page by concluding to begin with that the *AP* is ultimately a performance of Horace's superiority as a poet ('What Horace teaches the Piso brothers is finally not what to do or not to do but what he can do and they cannot' 198). My point is that we may well arrive at this valid conclusion, but only after much *labor*, which itself, potentially, has a range of (didactic) functions.

⁶ Oliensis (1998) 5, 13-14 (referring to S. Greenblatt's Foucauldian notion of self-fashioning: see Greenblatt 1980).

⁷ Austin (1975); Foucault e.g. (1980), 78-108, Bourdieu (1991), Butler (1997) and (1998).

manners laid bare for inspection and to perform (self-)censorship under the imagined eye of an exposed censor: my critique is acutely aware of the spread of vulnerabilities thus revealed and of the ways in which the one spelt-out lesson of the *AP*—strive for perfection and canny self-reproach in poetic-as-social, political and bodily performance—must take effect and be wrestled with in the very process of reading or editing this *sermo*-like text. The intensely politicizing *AP* traps or seduces its audience into enacting ‘becoming a poet-critic’ as arduous, real-life *negotium*.⁸]

I: The cultured cringe

Horace’s *AP*, more than likely composed around 10BCE and addressed to Lucius Calpurnius Piso the Pontifex (48BCE-32CE) and his adolescent sons, is an intimidatingly smart ~~and iambically sharp~~ poem about power, tradition and change over time.⁹ At several points (especially vv. 263-274, 285-294, 323-332) it praises Greek artistic achievement and disparages Roman poetry and critics as technically poor, overindulged, derivative and facile. Materialistic, pragmatic Roman culture is described as pathetically uncondusive to the development of artistic sensibilities, and Rome is renowned for its military prowess (relatively speaking?) only because it is so lacking in literary accomplishments. The Pisones should spend night and day poring over Greek models (269), which are where the real artistry and inspiration lies. Roman poets (and their critics) have tried hard, experimented like teenagers with almost every style (285), and done a little better when they’ve been steered towards *domestica facta*, but the Pisones’ own forefathers were frankly idiots (*stulte mirati* 272) to think Plautus a model of metrical brilliance and wit. Young men of real ambition need to learn the virtues of the *litura* (‘erasure’ or ‘smearing’ 293, cf. *atrum signum*, 446-7), taking themselves to task, giving ornament the chop (447-8), and condemning any *carmen* which has not gone through at least ten painful edits and passed the test of the well-trimmed nail (*praeseptum . . . ad unguem*, 294).¹⁰

The basic message in the ~~un-cooperative~~¹¹ body of this poem, then, is that you’ll only write top-notch poetry if you’re your own best critic.¹² And perhaps that’s especially true—Horace hints—of the high-born, entitled, rich *and* intellectual young Pisones, who ~~have got it coming~~ perhaps need polishing up if they want to activate their full potential as future masters of the Roman

⁸ Cf. Lowrie (2014) on ‘a new kind of participation in a new public sphere’, whereby the by now extinct figure of the Censor, the prestigious magistracy charged with keeping public morals, is replaced by the poet-as-censor, fastidious critic and moral judge of his own and others’ work (141, 136-7).

⁹ On the date of the poem, see section IV, *infra*.

¹⁰ See Rudd (1989) *ad loc.* and D’Angour (1999) on this metaphor.

¹¹ Laird (2007) 135.

¹² The method of putting words ‘under erasure’ here and in what follows owes much of course to Heidegger and Derrida, but whereas they use ~~erasure~~ to mark commonly accepted ideas, images or terms as contestable, inadequate or paradoxical, I want to explicitly indicate thoughts and judgements that, I argue, the *AP* potentially prompts yet at the same time censures (or encourages readers to censure as part of a process of developing critical skills) or renders deeply problematic or unacceptable in the light of instruction on maintaining decorum – instruction that is reinforced and reproduced by much of modern criticism on this poem.

universe in politics and the arts. This core, satiric paradox (beat yourself up if you think you're worth it) enriches the didactic premise of the *AP*, or as Péter Hadju argues, 'renders it unstable'¹³: Teacher must therefore also perform exacting and illustrative self-critique in order to assert his superior expertise, but we may decide to rate this highly as an effective educational strategy. Horace creates a dynamic arena in which the relative power/class status of non-equals can be paraded, tested, challenged and turned on its head, in which the *derisor* or 'mockers' is your hard-to-find best friend (432-3), the greatest *honor* arises from ordinariness (243¹⁴), and Rome's pathetic cultural inferiority in the arts is posited as a catalyst for imperialistic, perfectionistic ambition.

From the start, then, we are to imagine the Pisones standing up to old-fogey Professor's high-minded 'conservatism', intervening in vv. 9-10 with talk of (their) *potestas*, a word applied here to artistic freedom but loaded with political power (specifically, the sons' imagined future public office).¹⁵ Their '*...semper fuit aequa potestas*' ('there's always been an equal right...'¹⁶)—irreverence backed up by a snooty-sounding appeal to tradition—exudes naivety, arrogance, and a ton of privilege. The Pisones, naturally, take their *libertas* for granted and people like them have always done so, forever. The much older man and appointed authority on the subject, who when he was a lad (*libertino patre natum*, *Sat.*1.6.6) took *no such thing* as read, first replies in the first person plural (*scimus*, 11: 'we know' as in 'we know' or 'we know' as in *I* know, take your pick), conceding that they are not wrong, before reining them in: what you ~~rather~~ ~~ponpously~~ call *potestas* I shall rename *venia* ('indulgence'), upon which of course we must set reasonable limits (11, cf. 264, 267, 355).

The reassuringly inclusive *scimus* (we can confirm, if we're in the mood to match rather than contrast) returns at line 273, clarified by *ego et vos*, though coming just after Horace's mockery of the family forefathers (*vestri proavi*, 270). Author and (especially younger) addressees are potentially now a team, both parties a cut above. A second first person plural seals it (*scimus* . . . *callemus*, 273-4), yet in exemplary fashion this follow-up verb displays its shared cleverness as a witty hint at self-deprecation, matching or balancing out the gentle mockery of entitlement in vv. 9-10, and 270-1: 'We know how to distinguish coarseness from smooth charm, and we are well practised in recognizing [*callemus*] the lawful rhythm with fingers and ear' (273-4). Yet the archaic *callemus* can literally mean 'we have grown thick-skinned in . . . ' (see below): for artist-critics of distinction, a little unfiled callosity (as well as an appreciation of how words evolve) is essential. Ironically, Horace's recommended *callida iunctura* at vv. 47-8 (where he also plays a Lucretian

¹³ Hadju (2014) 85-6.

¹⁴ Cf. Arist. *Rh.* 3.2.1404b18ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Lowrie (2014) 130..

¹⁶ Translations here and throughout are my own.

atomological game: with the right joining, the *notum verbum* becomes *novum*¹⁷) is often translated as ‘smooth joining’. But the subtle wordplay at vv.273-4 hints at a larger didactic point for would-be wordsmiths: the kinds of ‘joinings’ on display in the *AP* are—as many have noted—not so smooth (as the Oxford Latin Dictionary notes, *callidus* = *calleo* + *idus*; *calleo* literally means ‘to grow hard, ‘become calloused’). Yet that unobvious, indeed *skilled* roughness, or Horace’s confident performance of imperfection, allows his students just enough licence to practise their hardening skills—on this very worksheet. Nevertheless, they’ll have the good breeding to pardon his faults (cleverly designed for their benefit), and lo and behold, this very line (*sunt delicta tamen quibus ignovisse velimus*, ‘There are offences which we might like to overlook’ 347) spotlights one such flaw, discussed by Quintilian.¹⁸ By nudging us to see, in this poem about what is and is not acceptable poetry, how censorship is the condition of possibility not only of ‘good poetry’ but of reading/writing (or *agency*) in general, Horace can reframe his ~~excessive~~ disciplining of the Pisones as positively enabling.¹⁹ After all, dodging criticism means you’ll get no kudos, either (*vitavi denique*²⁰ *culpam, non laudem merui*, ‘At last, I’ve avoided blame, but I have not deserved any praise’, 276-8).

If this Professor of Creative Writing, Literary Criticism and Philology is aiming to foster a first-class inferiority complex in his addressees, he has—*surely*—their best interests at heart. They’ll never raise their game otherwise, and becoming excellent poets is possibly the only thing in life that won’t come easy to them (though *this* self-made poet makes it look easy: those who attempt the same will sweat in vain, 240-2). ~~Nothing passive-aggressive about that at all.~~ Neither is there much mileage in the theory that a poet at the end of his career (if we assume the later dating), gazing back wistfully to his first publications (as commentators note, the beginning and end of the *Ars* subtly remakes the beginning and end of *Satire* 1.1²¹) knows that seniority comes with having cashed in all ‘future potential’, and is taking the opportunity vicariously (i.e. ~~enviously~~) to enjoy the excitement of sculpting young talent.²² Actually, raw poetic talent is a great social leveler (it’s the one thing class can’t buy, and that experts can’t teach), but we are assuming that the Pisones have all that in spades. ~~Otherwise...~~ What they don’t have—yet—is the critical acumen, the *ars* or *calliditas*, without which *natura* amounts to not much (408-11): this is one of the dozens of natural pairs Horace invites us to stick together in this poem as a post-Aristotelian exercise in consistency

¹⁷ A similar trick is on show at vv. 335-6: ‘whatever you teach (*quidquid praecipies*), be brief, so that minds can grasp (*percipiant*) what is said quickly’ (i.e. the Lucretian reader understands that *praecepta* are received by the eyes and that visual reordering = understanding).

¹⁸ Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.41 *videndum . . . ne syllaba verbi prioris ultima et prima sequentis consonet*. Noted by Brink *ad loc.*

¹⁹ Cf. Butler (1998).

²⁰ ~~That *denique* is deliciously cruel, especially when it echoes and remakes the *denique* of v.23.~~

²¹ E.g. Hardie (2014b). Horace has become his own father, who at *Sat.* 1.4.105-43 is remembered for how he gave his son advice and examples of virtue and vice.

²² Horace was always a man of the youth: see also *Odes* 3.1.4 (*virginibus puerisque canto*), and Rudd (1989) 4.

and uniformity (cf. *ut nec pes nec et caput uni / reddatur formae*, ‘so that neither head nor foot can be reduced to a single shape’ 8-9; *denique sit quod vis, simplex dumtaxat et unum*, ‘Ultimately, let it be what you will, but at least make it one homogenous whole’ 23). Already, in these opening lines, Horace seems to put on display the censor’s self-exposure: he is bound to cite and illustrate the very thing he wants to emphasize as illicit.²³ The *AP* is both a guide to critical judgement and at the same time a master(full)-class in practical criticism. Horace teaches critical thinking only at the highest level, making no concessions to the boys who have everything (bar this—though they may choose to take difficulty as a compliment). Those who think the poem seems ‘unsystematic’, or reckon (other) critics ‘sometimes exaggerate its difficulties’²⁴ perhaps haven’t grasped the challenge. They should keep at it, give themselves nine years and—no guarantee, mind—they may improve (386-90).

II: Here’s the rub

At lines 304-6 of his poem, Horace offers a metaphor which at once attempts to dodge, and at the same time invites, criticism of the *AP* qua poem. He shall not be judged as a poet, right now, while you are being judged on your critical abilities, because he’s not actually even writing at all (*nil scribens ipse* 306), and is more of a blunt whetstone for young blades to rub against and sharpen their swords on (*ergo fungar vice cotis*, 304). This image might read as a lure to elite readers to step right up and do their worst: in this module, Horace provides not just a graduate-level critical laboratory but the chance to test out the blades he is all the while rendering lethal. What kind of spectacle will this strategy elicit? ~~Will they/we dare, will sparks fly, and who will giggle first?~~²⁵ By engineering a less than perfect, perhaps even flawed identity, by masochistically offering his own body to be pieced together and worn down by students’ increasingly acute *ferrum*, and by performing what he bans you from ever putting in your posh poetry (1-5), dutiful Professor baits you to react, and teaches you to ~~ensor~~ teach yourself.

Rome’s superlative poet-critic instructs by fostering empowerment within classroom limits while also modelling humility and (~~cocky~~) self-critique. By the time we get to the final, shocking ‘mad poet’ scene, where boys are merciless in teasing some frenzied writer with a God complex, we have (hopefully) already been tempted to practise this on Teacher (author of ‘*non usitata nec tenui*

²³ Cf. Butler (1997, 1998), e.g. (1997, 250): ‘Censorship is exposed to a certain vulnerability precisely through becoming explicit’.

²⁴ Armstrong (1993) 185.

²⁵ Cf. the use of the whetstone by Cupid at *Odes* 2.8.15-16, with Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) *ad loc.* Will sword-sharpening for lit. crit. be all in earnest, or is there room for sparks and mischievous boy-Cupids here? These illicit thoughts are in part responding to Geue (2014), who wants to see the poet of *AP* as diplomatic tamer and neutralizer; I have edited back in the inseparable opposing voice of the (reckless, or masterful?) goader and provocateur, who potentially takes the same lesson to a higher level (they/we may still pass, yet only if censorship comes from within).

*ferar / pinna...*²⁶ no less), who is nevertheless not so much victim as rejuvenated collaborator. As Horace puts it to his students at the end, referring to the crazy poet who fell into a pit or well while looking at the heavens, ‘how do you know he didn’t throw himself in on purpose, and doesn’t wish to be saved?’ (462-3). But get carried away and pursue this bear-like creature too hard or in too puerile a manner and he’ll catch you and read you to death (*tenet occiditque legendo*, 475), sucking out all that blue blood just as surely as Maecenas ‘killed’ Horace with his nagging in *Epode* 14, back in the day (*candide Maecenas, occidis saepe rogando*, ‘Honest Maecenas, you kill me by asking repeatedly...’ 14.5). If, with Oliensis, we entertain identifying The Leech with Horace, this aggressive yet familiar closural apology (‘I really am a terrible pest!’)²⁷ also doubles up as elegantly veiled, self-mocking promotion for Horace as the heir-to-Maecenas, senior Patron of Patrons, high on power and rapidly losing sight of his official didactic objectives (*indoctum* or *doctum*, who cares?, 476²⁸). By extension, perhaps nostalgic Teacher can be seen to see himself in his young pupils—a vision they might read as flattering empathy or as demotion.

The *AP*’s disciplinary coda perfectly captures and sustains the ultra-stimulating, self-exposing dynamic I have begun to describe in the poem as a whole. The leech (*hirudo*, the poem’s final word, 476, a mischievously mutated *humano*, 1²⁹) is not just a monstrous practical joke played by a ‘with it’ instructor who undertakes annual purges himself just as the season of renewal kicks in, as if to fend off regression to angry young manhood (*o ego laevus, / qui purgor bilem sub verni temporis horam!* ‘O fool that I am, to purge myself of bile at the start of Spring!’ 301-2). More precisely, it turns healthy, hot-blooded *pueri*, who thought *they* were hounding a madman, into patients in need of medical attention or a Maecenas-style taking-in-hand. Didactic Doctor (a sick poet himself, perhaps, or a healer *prudently* pretending to be ill) is being cruel to be kind, and using your laughter as a natural anaesthetic (Lucretius’ honey-laced potion has nothing on this³⁰). Yet the image also enacts the point that after all that rubbing along together in the classroom, teacher and pupils, *recitator* and listeners, are conjoined. Patient and leech (a real life Lamia of v. 340 not just sucking but perhaps even devouring a *vivum puerum*?) appear as a closural perversion of Aristotelian unity, or even of Socratic intimacy. The *right kind* of clinging, incidentally, was advised back in v. 195 (*haereat apte*, ‘may it blend in properly’). Despite the fact that an outsized leech may bleed you dry, suck up your privilege and feed off your hot-blooded youth (even claiming to do you some good in the process), the downside, for someone, is that while your death is a metaphor (after *Epode* 14), the leech is far more likely to *actually* die in the process. As Pliny

²⁶ *Odes* 2.20.1-2, cf. 3.30.

²⁷ Cf. Oliensis (1998) 219.

²⁸ Cf. *scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim*, *Epist.* 2.1.117. [CROSSREFERENCE: MATZNER]

²⁹ Oliensis (1989) 215.

³⁰ Indeed honey spoils some things and makes them offensive: poppy seeds for instance (*AP* 375)

remarked, leeches sometimes need to be cut off with scissors (*NH* 32.123-4) so that they don't leave their heads in the patient's flesh and cause an incurable, even fatal wound, and turning remedy into poison (*in veneni virum remedio verso*). It is time, in other words, to get out your *ferrum* (sharpened as you read) and show what you are made of, before this lesson becomes even more painful. 'CUT!!' ~~screams~~ infers our experienced Director, inviting us to clamp down on this gaping, abject mouth while reminding us that there is always something about the text being censored that exceeds the reach of the censor (which might be good *and* bad for *libertas*).³¹ But snip off this reciting human leech whole, before it can join you long-term to its hanging *caput* (→*AP* 1, what a picture!), before in other words it can murder you while self-sacrificing, and you will also have ruined what we must now admit is the potentially intricate, textbook unity of this *carmen*, framed by grotesque human and animal heads.³² When *you* kill 'Horace' by reading (*legendo*, 475), you may have also 'failed'. Or on second thoughts, you have learnt how impossible it is to make that *litura*, but go ahead and do it anyway. Having completed this ~~bloody~~ controlled experiment, you are now ready to try your hand at a tragedy. ~~If you have the strength.~~³³

III: Start as you mean to drone on

We should emphasize that it takes hard graft not to be deceived by appearances (v. 25), which tend to deliver us the *AP* as over-long, over-complicated, unclear instruction that shows its joins and seems to be constantly turning into something else, much like the work of art described in the pottery metaphor of vv. 21-2, or worse, like the chimaera pieced together by the modern painter in vv. 1-4. I've already hinted at more ways in which the *AP*'s own startling *pes* is in fact beautifully and horrifically joined to the body and head of this poem. Indeed, read again through the first 37 lines and—with some vigorous filing—all those juddering gear shifts from one mixed metaphor to another can be smoothed out quite professionally, if we're prepared to knuckle ~~under~~ down. For example, after *inceptis gravibus* at line 14 (have we just read one of those 'noble beginnings'?), we veer off on a tangent about purple passages and whizz from overly innovative painting to fabric stitching (*adsuitur pannus*, 16), back to (trite, realistic) painting (19-21), and on to pots on wheels (21-2). But it all comes down to *coepit* vs *exit* (21-2), or in other words *caput* vs *pes*. And the metaphor hidden within the pot metaphor, if we are inclined to look beneath surfaces (the wine jug becomes a water pitcher, evoking familiar figures for contrasting kinds of poetry identified with

³¹ Cf. Butler (1997) and (1998). **[CROSSREFERENCE: GEUE]**

³² The leech, in other words, is in various ways a *pharmakon*, both a poison and a cure (a cure which offers various possibilities for the student to 'heal' the *Ars Poetica*, or to make it a unified whole). Another healing option involves linking the fish end (*piscem*, 4) of the poem's beginning to the leech ending: Pliny also pairs fish with leeches, because while the leech (*sanguisuga*) sucks out blood, fish were thought to *produce* blood in the body when eaten (cf. Pliny *NH* 32.42: *sanguinem fieri piscum cibo putant*). See also note 36.

³³ On models for leech-like behaviour in Horace's satires, see Oliensis (1998) 218.

water and wine, and getting us to focus already not just on heads and feet but on body or *contents*) just goes to show that the very methodology or *ars* of the *AP* will consist in hinting at multiple, ongoing connections between apparently contrasting pairs. Line 24 seems, again, to be done with lesson number 1: we're on to the difficulty of not lapsing into faults even when you know what to aim for. But we're still on the topic of the monstrous combinations of things which should not go together, the adverb *prodigaliter* in v. 29 matching *turpiter* in v. 3. True to form, Horace is continuing, consistently, to harp on about mismatched or misplaced animals (snakes with birds and lambs with tigers in 13, dolphins in forests and a boar in the waves here in line 30), and is conjuring up his own human hybrids to vary the horse neck plus human head of v. 1. Take for instance the poet who plays it safe, and 'creeps along the ground' (*serpit humi*) ~~like a snake~~ (28).³⁴

In v. 32 we skip on again, to another art form—sculpture. But the theme continues. It's no good specializing in bits of bodies, like this lowly craftsman 'at the bottom of the row' (*imus*, cf. *ad imum* 126; *imum* 152; *ad imum* 378) who in bronze (*aere*, 33, picking up and recasting the *aere dato* of v. 21)³⁵ fashions nails and hair but not a whole figure. It's not glaringly obvious (that would be patronizing), but we've understood that hair is on the *caput* and nails also come on toes (*pedes*): the idea is that it's not enough to match head to foot if you don't consider what comes in between (but if you had picked up on the subtext of the pot metaphor, to do with differing, contrasting contents, you would have had a heads-up on that). At which point we are rewarded, potentially, with a joke: Horace adds a simile to his sculpture metaphor, putting his own live body into the dead bits of statue: 'If I cared to compose something (*componere* in line 35 ~~fusing~~ serving double duty as 'to craft' and 'to write'), I would no more wish to be like him than to live with a wonky nose despite being admired for my black eyes and black hair' (36-7). Teacher fails cannily and invites censorship here, because his analogy isn't about the *totum*, just the *caput* (nose plus hair, a disembodied head). And now we come to think of it, that phrase *nigris oculis nigroque capillo* might show off sameness, but looks—if we're being critical—a tad banal.³⁶ On the other hand, we *have* gone logically from pondering the 'bad dream' of a painted *caput humanum* on the wrong neck (1), to *looking at* the mismatched head of the author-speaker of this poem (*spectandum* 37, cf. *spectatum*, 5).

Lines 38ff. are onto a different topic (*sumite materiam vestris*), and we must think hard about what kind of theme our shoulders will bear (*quid valeant umeri*, 40). But again, we have to

³⁴ Citroni (2009) shows what we miss, if, as he argues, Horace keeps 'the marvellous' in tight check.

³⁵ What is *aere perennius* (C.3.30.1)? Not the meaning of the word *aes*, which is always changing. *aes* = money, again, at v.164 (the *iuvēnis* is *prodigus aeris*) and v.345.

³⁶ Compare *Odes* 1.32.10-12 (*canebat, / et Lycum nigris oculis nigroque / crine decorum*), with its entertaining *variatio* on *niger* (now with a long, now with a short first syllable), *not* replicated in the *AP* (where both syllables are long).

have our heads screwed on right, lose the arrogance, and pick the right place to start (*caput*³⁷), the right weight of lofty material to be borne up by our bodies as texts, just the way Horace's head example (above) has shown. Have we got the potential to make this 'poem of parts'³⁸ work, to turn *potestas* (10) into the power to avoid overestimating our abilities (38-40)?³⁹ The adverb *potenter* at v. 40 is a ~~red-rag~~ case in point: Horace brilliantly leaves it to the scholiasts and philologists to drain privilege and arrogance from this word, which now signifies not 'powerfully' but 'within his capabilities' (~~and they may turn out to be modest!~~) or 'effectively'.⁴⁰ The *AP* is a two-in-one poem, an 'amalgam' in many different ways:⁴¹ it instructs and entertains, presenting itself as a handbook and a live experiment, a cure and a poison, a carrot and a stick; it walks a fine line between performing slickness and showing the joins in a clever illusion of near-amateurism. It is complicatedly inferior in order to rally (~~and bite back at~~) its reader-critics as they make the final edit.

IV. Grow up, and act your age

Recent criticism is avowing the *AP*'s new timeliness,⁴² but the poem's spiny, self-flagellating doubleness is inherently time-specific and time-sensitive. Debates on dating the *AP* focus on the age of Piso's (which Piso?) sons: it's tricky, as many have argued, to read *iuvenes* (24), qualified by *et voce paterna / fingeris ad rectum et per te sapis* ('although you were moulded to correct judgement by the paternal voice and are wise yourself...' 366-7) as referring to anyone older than boys who have recently assumed the *toga virilis* and find themselves in what Armstrong calls that 'dangerous age for Roman youth', as malleable as the language and art they aim to shape (*fingentur* 8; *fingere*

³⁷ OLD *caput* 16a. The beginning, the first part (of a speech, action etc.). b. the beginning (of a word or sentence): initial letter.

³⁸ Geue (2014) 144, with further bibliography.

³⁹ The head-foot, high/low partnership or mismatch continues, always transforming: e.g. *tumido . . . ore* (94) vs *sermone PEDEStri* (95); *aut impellit ad iram* (109), *aut ad humum . . . deducit* (110); the theatre's *equites* (recalling the equine neck of v. 1) plus *pedites* (113). Lines 151-2 tease that you'll either be at rock bottom or soar to the top as a poet; cf. 220ff., on avoiding having a god or hero shift inappropriately from high speech/dress to *obscuras humili sermone tabernas* (229), or worse, *dum vitat humum, nubes et inania captet* (230). At 244ff., the iamb is a perfect blend of long and short, top and bottom, its beat *primus ad extremum similis*, 254, cf. *coepit . . . exit*, 21-2, and in contrast to v.4 (*desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne*). Skilled critics spot good rhythm with ears and fingers/toes, in a whole body experience, at vv. 274. Mad and pretentious poets neglect both beard (head) and (toe?)nails at v. 297. At 430, the insincere friend/critic of your poetry will fake head-to-toe bodily consistency (*ex oculis rorem, saliet, tundet pede terram*, 430). And finally, the crazy poet looks up (*sublimis*), no doubt thinking he belongs in higher realms, only to fall to the bottom of a pit or well. Or perhaps not finally, given that leeches were often applied to relieve pain in the feet caused by gout (*podagra*, cf. Pliny *NH* 32.123), a picture that, if imagined, adds a slimy tail to a human *pes*, offering an ugly male-female hybrid to the beautiful woman whose legs are a fish tail at the 'head' of the poem, line 4 (cf. Oliensis, 1998, 217).

⁴⁰ See Brink (1971) and Rudd (1989) *ad loc.*: 'The word needs explanation' (Brink).

⁴¹ Cf. Oliensis (1998, 3) on Horace throughout his career: 'gestures of pure deference and pure authority are much rarer . . . than mixtures of the two.' Cf. Gowers (2012, 5) on 'composite' Horace.

⁴² See Ferenczi's introduction to Ferenczi and Hardie (2014).

50; *finge* 119; *fingi* 331; *fingere* 382).⁴³ The alternative scenario on the table, that the *AP* might be addressed to the (at least, attested) sons of a very different Cn. Calpurnius Piso, who would have been in their twenties even if we date the poem ten years or so earlier, is as a result rather less convincing.⁴⁴ But the speaker-poet's own age—if we go with the first dating, a senior author of around 55, with as fate would have it only a couple of years or so left—is equally significant, as is the accompanying distance from poems like *Satire* 1.6, to which the *AP* often seems to allude. At least, Horace's own Aristotelian instruction on paying attention to the age of actors (a 'mature man' or a 'one still in the flower and fervour of youth', 115-16), and to the *mores* of each age group when writing dialogue for the stage (153-178) is a good deal more interesting if we imagine Poet satirizing *himself* (rather than, or as well as Piso senior⁴⁵) as the not very sagacious *miser senex* of vv. 169-174—sluggish, difficult, surly, given to rose-tinted nostalgia about his own boyhood, as well as (this is presumably the punchline) to castigating and censoring the young: *castigator censorque minorum* (174). This is—potentially—a gift for the Pisones, a free laugh not just at *pater*, who is subtly sidelined as an addressee for the bulk of the poem, but at the self-castigating Praeceptor's expense. But run with ironic self-reflection and they will also be pressed into seeing themselves in the changeable *puer* (160), or in the *imberbis iuvenis* ('unbearded youth') freed at last from his tutor (161): suggestible, wax-soft, and a little *asper* with his counsellors (163: ~~show some vim, lads, I've sanctioned it!~~). They may or may not connect *sublimis* (165) with *sublimis* (457)⁴⁶ and infer some 'pride comes before a fall' lesson from their acute close reading. In short, *castigator censorque* promotes self-censoring. In vv. 173-4 ([*senex*] *laudator temporis acti / se puero*, '[the old man] praises the time he spent as a boy') Teacher also ~~cleverly reveals~~ lets slip his own perverse investment in those minors he likes to knock down because they can take a punch, as if all the time reminiscing on (~~or sending up his nostalgia for~~) his own superior boyhood. Are we now recalling those conservative old bores who are too proud to yield to their juniors but won't admit that what they learnt as *imberbes* should now be destroyed in the name of modernity, at *Epist.* 2.1.83-5? Heaven forbid we get confused over who is playing the *senex* and who the *iuvenis*, inadvertently producing another of those top-tail misfits (176-8).

We must also add cultural inferiority to this hard-to-untangle blend of authoritative ~~reproach~~ counsel and boyish sport. In the passage at lines 323-332, Romans are boys (*pueri*, 325) doing plodding arithmetic in the cultural classroom next to well-established Greek artists, who have always successfully combined *ingenium* with *ars*. On the one hand, Horace appeals to the young

⁴³ Armstrong (1993) 199.

⁴⁴ See Geue's bold experiment with this option (2014).

⁴⁵ As Geue (2014) argues.

⁴⁶ Brink (1971, *ad loc.*) nails it when he comments 'The thought then is Aristotelian but the power of catching in a single word the characteristically mixed state of youthful idealism and conceit is Horatian'.

Pisones' snobbery here: 'they are not the kind of Roman boys who were educated this way'.⁴⁷ On the other, he implies that Roman literary culture is, relatively speaking, in its infancy.⁴⁸ Later on, would-be Roman poets are like egotistical children, who boast in mock-heroic fashion of their 'awesome poems' one minute ("ego mira poemata pango", 'I compose such marvellous poems' 416⁴⁹), before going back to playing tag the next (*occupet extremum scabies*, 'the last one's got the plague!' 417), an iambic curse also visualizable (*ut pictura poesis*) as the unfortunate desire to match healthy head to diseased rear—a grotesque partnership recreated in *AP*'s own end scene of kids chasing a *scabies*-infected poet (453) and getting caught themselves.

When a reciting human leech smells blood at the *AP*'s finale (the possibly derisory *o Pompilius sanguis*, no less, v. 292, cf. *pauperum / sanguis parentum*, *Odes* 2.20.5-6), the author of this poem seems to latch onto, mimic, or appropriate the kind of humour and transformability he associates with the *puer* of vv. 158-160, and the *pueri* of 456 (after the *pueri* of line 325, poised to rebel against teacher's humiliating sarcasm—"poteras dixisse", '“You could've told me by now”' v. 328).⁵⁰ In the name of 'one shape' unity, the late-middle-aged poet, old enough to ~~oust~~ be the Pisones' father, ~~risks/enjoys~~ comes close in the end to joining himself to his *amici/pueri/iuvenes*, so that the line between young and old, novices and old-hand, pupils and teacher, blue-bloods and ~~freedman's son~~ slightly socially disadvantaged expert could almost blur. Indeed, it will take a certain amount of self-control and maturity to not link the 'curse' of the deluded verse-monger/inspired Empedoclean didactic poet with the perverse joining that is incest (*nec satis apparet, cur versus facit, utrum / minxerit in patrios cineres, an triste bidental / moverit incestus*, 'Nor is it really clear why he keeps on versifying: perhaps he has pissed on the ancestral ashes, or been lewd and disturbed a sacred plot' 470-2). Rudd passes this test with flying colours, noting '*incestus*: *in* + *castus*, hence "unholy" . . . one might translate "thus committing sacrilege".⁵¹ Likewise Brink, in a wonderfully Horatian display of the hypocrisy or inefficacy of censorship, reassures that although 'the metaphor of the leech is known from the Greek', Theocritus 2.55-6 (in which Ἐπὼς is the leech clinging onto and draining the lover) 'have a different connotation'.⁵²

More generally, the *AP* enacts youthful Roman mutability in its very form: it performs endless change (though it does so consistently - a staged, controlled puerility?), and as a result has

⁴⁷ Armstrong (1993) 209. .

⁴⁸ Yet there is a hint here perhaps of a neo-Callimachean childishness, i.e. one reminiscent of Callimachus' self-fashioning as a playful, curious and slightly rebellious 'boy' of a poet, most famously in the *Aetia* prologue (fr.1.5-6 Pf, with Cozzoli 2011).

⁴⁹ Is Horace poking fun at Lucretian pretensions here? (cf. *DRN* 1.933-4: *deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango / carmina, musaeo contingens cuncta lepore*).

⁵⁰ There is plenty of scope for reading a 'grow up' tone into this increasing talk of *pueri* rather than *iuvenes*, though equally the Pisones are perhaps just old enough to rise above, patronizing the 'little boys' together with speaker-teacher, rather than feeling patronized by him.

⁵¹ Rudd (1989) *ad loc.* with OLD *incestus*.

⁵² Brink (1971) *ad loc.*, with Butler (1997) and (1998).

bewildered critics who react to feeling they are on that potter's wheel at v. 22. Unstoppable changeability is the poem's highly political and time-specific message, boosted further by the idea of catering to its youthful addressees. It is exactly the inferior immaturity of Roman literary culture that sets off Rome's immense potential (embodied in the younger Pisones) to transform and reinvent 'tradition'. Boyish fickleness will explain, if not excuse (*pueri* will be *pueri*) pissing on your forefathers' graves, as the speaker of the poem already did, more or less, at v. 272 (compare the crazy poet at v. 471). So when Horace writes that the Pisones should study Greek models by night and by day (*vos exemplaria Graeca / nocturna versate manu, versate diurna*, 268-9), he has on one hand shown, at v. 39, that *versate* means 'focus on', 'debate', 'study', 'think long and hard about', but on the other hand offers us the playful, empowering possibility of understanding the verb as 'change', 'twist', 'remould', 'adapt [words and attitudes]'.⁵³ The Pisones might, in other words, swap cultural inferiority for a culturally specific creativity. Be studious, yet audacious, Horace suggests (265-269); for the excellent updating of old words (note again the miraculous Lucretian shifting of letters in this still-evolving microcosmos: *notum*→*novum*), see above (*AP* 47-8). Just as Roman poets are praised when they have dared (*ausi*, 287) to leave the Greeks behind, a nod towards the Pisones' own reference to daring in v. 10 (as well as to the ineffectual daring of v. 242, *ausus*) so the boys should study Greek models, but also hazard their own 'clever collocation' (*callida . . . iunctura*, 47-8), reading transformation into Teacher's example-setting.

The Pisones are subtly, consistently, urged to be the playful, vibrant fresh blood they are, and not to attempt to appear older and wiser beyond their years. The experienced speaker manages to communicate this by staying just enough in role as sombre father figure while also appealing to the young aristocrat's quandary of how to reconcile his stake in tradition with the desire to be at the cool cutting edge: hence respecting *mores* turns out to be about being age-specific and respecting the path of time (156ff.). The thing about tradition is that it's always changing, and this is entirely *natural*, as meant-to-be as trees losing their leaves in autumn and re-growing them in spring. In vv. 58-63, Horace takes the boys' arrogant use of *semper* in line 10 and tames it, inserting their 'forever' into nature's cycle and making it express a slightly more acceptable ~~entitlement disguised as *rerum natura*~~ assertion of creative licence: it will *always* (*semper*) be permitted to invent new words (58-9), and to understand words differently (269).

Here, then, we might see conservatism and ebullient youth working together: a purer kind of joining for a new, improved Establishment, and a status quo which can (~~be made to~~) construe Roman social mobility as attractively 'modern' *and* inspiring for the artistically ambitious upper

⁵³ OLD, *verso* 7a and b. For the playful, humorous tone of this line see Brink (1971) *ad loc.* who notes the parallel with *Epist.* 1.19.11 (*nocturno certare mero, putere diurno*) yet concludes there can be no overt allusion since 'such an allusion would be out of keeping with the desired effect'—somewhat of a circular argument.

classes. These *pueri/iuvenes Romani* are in the flower of youth, just the candidates to take this poem and use it to find all kinds of *potestas* in the stereotypes of Rome's cultural backwardness. Indeed, Horace intimates at vv. 63-69, the Roman empire is itself going through adolescent (and entirely natural) change. At least, his examples (a new port making the sea as safe as land; sterile marshland turned into arable land; a river which like the reformed student has 'learnt a better path') may be vague, but we may be tempted to think of specifics: harbours like the *portus Iulius* (cf. Virg. *Georg.* 2.161-4), drainage works like that projected by Julius Caesar for the Pomptine marshes, the diversion of a river like that projected by Julius Caesar for the Tiber (cf. Suet. *Iul.* 44.3). It turns out that Roman engineering, far from exemplifying Rome's cultural inferiority relative to Greece, can now stand for verbal inventiveness, for Rome's youthful power to alter the literary, as well as geographical and geopolitical landscape. Under Roman governance, sea and land can come together (an imperial pairing that would once have seemed monstrous and mythical—Neptune embraced by the land, 63-4—but, hold the stylus, not any more!), and even rivers can be tamed into self-improvement, becoming learned (poetic?) paths. Who said Roman practicality and poetic erudition couldn't go together? Horace is putting all his faith in ~~self-censoring~~ playful youth to make that happen.

V. Down from your high horse

The Pisones have got a lot to be excited about, it transpires. Equally, they have a lot to prove. Horace's tough love shows them how to keep their wits about them. He reins them in, allowing just the right amount of slack and lending them (masochistically at times) large doses of his own inventiveness. He also threatens—wickedly—to get too close (the boy who grew up a winner *feared* his master, *extimuitque magistrum*, he notes at v.415), knowing that they must acquire the *virtus* to cut him loose, the wit both to distinguish between things which look similar but are radically different, and to make connections between apparently disparate elements—arguably the first lesson of all critical inquiry. My discussion so far, then, has been leading up to a brief investigation of why the *AP* is so focused on tragic drama and and satyr plays.⁵⁴ As Michèle Lowrie argues, the answer must lie in part in the fact that the theatre is clearly a political arena, a site for envisioning the body politic (*populus* = audience, but also political entity), while tragedy offers a model for (covert) political engagement in the shadow of the *princeps*.⁵⁵ But the theatre as a social and political space also presents itself as a metaphor for visualizing the power-play implicit in this ~~agonizing~~ carefully crafted learning exercise. First of all, the theatre allows Horace to perform the *AP*'s strategy of

⁵⁴ On satyr plays in Augustan Rome see Wiseman (1988)

⁵⁵ Lowrie (2014).

placing teacher and students in the same enclosure, and is itself a figure for the performance of self-censorship as a productive force that shapes not only admissible expression but also the speaking subject himself. Within this theatre, author can swap places with addressees and imagine himself in *their* audience (laughing at them, or nodding off, 105). The theatre of poetry is itself (ideally) a mirror, he notes, in which the poet/actors cause the audience to reflect their emotions back to them: ‘If you want me to weep’ Horace writes at vv. 102-3, ‘you must first feel grief yourself’. Audience and expert actors/writers are as one here, enacting the single *forma* advocated in the proem (vv. 8-9) and deformed in the final leech-patient joining at vv. 474-5. The exemplary scene of faces smiling on those who smile, and weeping on those who weep (102-2) rewrites and corrects the jagged non-matching of *serpentes avibus . . . tigribus agni* (13, cf. 30), as well as restarting the poem by replacing *humano capiti* (1) with *humani voltus* (102), no equine neck attached.

Yet the theatre is both precisely organised and rather indiscriminate in bringing everyone together in the same (potentially satiric) space.⁵⁶ It is here, too, that we find the culmination of Horace’s head-feet (mis-)matching: all Romans, upper and lower classes alike (*equites peditesque*), all in the same *locus*, have a good, loud cackle (*tollent cachinnum*) at inappropriate lines (113). An *eques* is so called because originally he had the means to buy a horse, and became, as it were (in one of Horace’s many unobvious, off-stage jokes), part horse. Indeed, at line 248, *equus* is used to mean not horse but knight. ~~Nothing like the human head joined to a horse’s neck in that offensive bit of modern art glimpsed at vv. 1-5.~~ There are many distinctions to be made, but so far Horace stresses only those between actors (*intererit multum . . .* 114-118). On the theatre benches, meanwhile, ever since imperial expansion ensured venues were packed, simple country folk got *mixed up* with the city people, the ‘foul’ with the well-bred (*rusticus urbano confusus, turpis honesto* 213). The point is that if they take on tragic drama, the Pisones are going to have to *descendere in campum*, risk being laughed at, and take the rough with the smooth, the vulgar with the like-minded—despite the fact that their kind is obviously all about distinction, from which Horace himself, *natus libertino patre*, has surely benefited. As he wrote to Maecenas at *Satires* 1.6.62-3: ‘I count it a great honour that I pleased you, who discern between wretched and honest (*turpi secernis honestum*), not by a father’s fame, but by purity of life and heart’. Horace could have been judged *turpis* by elite patrons but scraped by the post and is now in a position to ‘patronise’ the young: the Pisones on the other hand, if they head down this path (and bear in mind that Horace himself steered clear of tragedy) will not only have to deal with the complexity of modernity (it all started when the flute was bound with brass and became a kind of hybrid trumpet, no longer *tenuis simplexque* at v. 203, taking us back to those famous last words, *denique sit quod vis, simplex*

⁵⁶ CROSSREFERENCE: GEUE

dumtaxat et unum, 23) but also with a *populus* that will react immediately—and perhaps cruelly—to their versifying. Roman theatre audiences are cast in the *AP* as democratic miscellanies containing many daring, provocative juxtapositions. ~~The *populus* is cackling *satura* itself, with legs.~~ Writing successful tragic drama is, Horace warns, about pleasing this moving, hybrid, reactive body (which includes Teacher, still *one of them* at v. 153: *ego et populus mecum*, ‘I, and the public with me’, rather than *ego et vos*, 272):

Yet although everyone in the audience will probably laugh together at a bad script (113), other errors—such as overly vulgar jokes coming out of the mouths of those goat-men satyrs (247-8)—are likely to offend some men of substance (*equus et pater et res*, ‘the knight and the father and the well-off gent’ 248), who often disapprove of the kind of material beloved of the lower classes, the sort who consume the cheap fried theatre snacks that figure a more plebeian poetic diet (249, cf. *Sat.* 1.6.115). The question is, then: can these discriminating *iuvenes* manage to please both *equites* and *pedites*, and have them react as one, unified creative corpus, just as Horace himself (from a very different point of origin) performed a ‘fine balancing act’⁵⁷ between his own rusticity and urbanity—a challenge to which this entire poem has them rise? Is that even possible? Will their superior class help them in an environment in which the posh might want not to give (their) *coronae* to the hoi polloi (249-50) but in which *coronae* can also mean ‘rings of [any old] spectators’ (381), empowered to laugh at *you, o maior iuvenum*? Would it be better to ditch this fatuous talk of becoming great tragedians before they laugh you off stage, now the *politics* of this kind of poetry are clear?⁵⁸

VI: Heads I win, tails you lose (to conclude...)

The *AP* ensures that there can be no way to rise safely above the poet-critic, or in other words to dissociate (his, your) superiority, whether innate or earned, from (his, Rome’s, your) inferiority; likewise, there seems to be no clean-cut way to split the punitive force or excess of (self-)censorship from its ‘neutral’ productive and enabling power (implicit in very instance of writing and of reading). In what is possibly his most mature work, Horace’s long-running ‘double game of differentiation and identification’⁵⁹ will prove infectious, and provide endless stimuli for the Pisones as they contemplate their incomplete *libertas*. Like the leech, or the *scabies*-infected poet, Horace-as-teacher sticks his ‘inferior’ status on his students, impressing upon them the notion that as Romans they cannot deny its broad cultural analogies, and that they will amount to nothing

⁵⁷ Gowers (2014, 215) on *Sat.* 1.6.

⁵⁸ As Oliensis puts it (2009, 463), ‘It is by no means obvious that poetry is a socially acceptable career for well-born boys such as these’. Cf. Hadju (2014) 95-6.

⁵⁹ Habinek (2005) 185.

without the skill to put themselves down in the name of A-list ambition. As he does so, he builds a rapport, an interdependency, that is figured in the microcosm of the theatre, where Rome's social classes are both divided and all in it together, and where the right to boo and cheer or to wield a critical *ferrum* is not allocated on the basis of class. In the theatre of *AP*, Horace gives it to them 'straight'. This makes him a great teacher and critic, the best they could possibly wish for. And also, undeniably, a son of a xxxxxx.

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