

of Horace. Bernard Frischer, in *Shifting Paradigms: New Approaches to Horace's "Ars Poetica"* (1991), presents a detailed statistical analysis of the epistle's many controversies.

Volume 3 of Brink's *Horace on Poetry* (cited above) contains an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources on Horace's literary criticism. For a more general work, see the bibliographical essay in *Horace: A Bimillenary Celebration* (ed. S. J. Harrison, 1995).

Ars Poetica¹

Unity and Consistency

Imagine a painter who wanted to combine a horse's neck with a human head, and then clothe a miscellaneous collection of limbs with various kinds of feathers, so that what started out at the top as a beautiful woman ended in a hideously ugly fish. If you were invited, as friends, to the private view, could you help laughing? Let me tell you, my Piso² friends, a book whose different features are made up at random like a sick man's dreams, with no unified form to have a head or a tail, is exactly like that picture.

'Painters and poets have always enjoyed recognized³ rights to venture on what they will.' [11] Yes, we know; indeed, we ask and grant this permission turn and turn about. But it doesn't mean that fierce and gentle can be united, snakes paired with birds or lambs with tigers.

Serious and ambitious designs often have a purple patch or two sewn on to them just to make a good show at a distance—a description of a grove and altar of Diana,⁴ the meanderings of a stream running through pleasant meads, the River Rhine, the rainbow: [19] but the trouble is, it's not the place for them.

Maybe you know how to do a picture of a cypress tree? What's the good of that, if the man who is paying for the picture is a desperate ship-wrecked mariner swimming to safety? The job began as a wine-jar: the wheel runs round—why is that a tub that's coming out? In short, let it be what you will, but let it be simple and unified.

Skill Needed to Avoid Faults

Most of us poets—father and worthy sons—are deceived by appearances of correctness. I try to be concise, but I become obscure; my aim is smoothness, but sinews and spirit fail; professions of grandeur end in bombast; the over-cautious who fear the storm creep along the ground. Similarly, the writer who wants to give fantastic variety to his single theme [30] paints a dolphin in his woods and a wild boar in his sea. If art is wanting, the flight from blame leads to faults. The poorest smith near the School of Aemilius⁵ will reproduce nails and mimic soft hair in bronze; though he has no luck with the over-all effect of his work, because he won't know how to organize the

1. Translated by D. A. Russell. In this prose translation of Horace's verse, subheads have been added by the translator.

2. Horace is thought to have addressed the *Ars* to Lucius Calpurnius Piso (48 B.C.E.–32 C.E.) and his sons, though none of the sons has been positively

identified.

3. Or "equal" [translator's note].

4. Roman goddess of the hunt, the moon, and childbirth.

5. A school for gladiators, near the shops of bronze workers.

whole. If I were anxious to put anything together, I would as soon be that man as I would live with a mis-shapen nose when my black eyes and black hair had made me a beauty.

You writers must choose material equal to your powers. Consider long what your shoulders will bear and what they will refuse. [40] The man who chooses his subject with full control will not be abandoned by eloquence or lucidity of arrangement.

As to arrangement: its excellence and charm, unless I'm very wrong, consist in saying at this moment what needs to be said at this moment, and postponing and temporarily omitting a great many things. An author who has undertaken a poem must be choosy—clinging to one point and spurn another.

As to words: if you're delicate and cautious in arranging them, you will give distinction to your style if an ingenious combination makes a familiar word new. If it happens to be necessary to denote hidden mysteries by novel symbols, [50] it will fall to you to invent terms the Cethegi in their loin-cloths⁶ never heard—and the permission will be granted if you accept it modestly—and, moreover, your new and freshly invented words will receive credit, if sparingly derived from the Greek springs. Is the Roman to give Caecilius and Plautus privileges denied to Virgil and Varius? Why am I unpopular if I can make a few acquisitions, when the tongue of Cato and Ennius⁸ so enriched their native language and produced such a crop of new names for things?

Fashions in Words

It always has been, and always will be, lawful to produce a word stamped with the current mark. [60] As words change in leaf as the seasons slide on, and the first leaves fall, so the old generation of words dies out, and the newly born bloom and are strong like young men. We and our works are a debt owed to death. Here a land-locked sea protects fleets from the North wind—a royal achievement; here an old barren marsh where oars were piled feeds neighbouring cities and feels the weight of the plough; here again a river gives up a course that damaged the crops and learns a better way. But whatever they are, all mortal works will die; and still less can the glory and charm of words endure for a long life. [70] Many words which have fallen will be born again, many now in repute will fall if usage⁹ decrees: for in her hand is the power and the law and the canon of speech.

Metre and Subject

Histories of kings and generals, dreadful wars: it was Homer¹ who showed in what metre these could be narrated. Lines unequally yoked in pairs²

6. I.e., primitive Romans [translator's note].

7. Roman poet (ca. 74–14 B.C.E.), friend of Virgil and Horace; author of the tragedy *Thyestes*.

8. Gaius Statius (d. ca. 168 B.C.E.), former slave from Cilium who wrote Latin comedies. Plautus (d. ca. 184 B.C.E.), Roman comic dramatist whose plays were modeled on Greek New Comedy originals.

9. Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), Roman poet and friend of Horace.

10. Roman tragic and epic poet (ca. 239–169 B.C.E.) who tried to refine the Latin language according to Greek example. Cato (234–149

B.C.E.), Roman statesman, stern moralist, and prolific writer of treatises and history.

11. Or "need" [translator's note].

12. Greek epic poet (8th c. B.C.E.) to whom the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are traditionally attributed.

13. In elegiac couplets, formed by a dactylic hexameter (a 6-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short-short) and a line replacing the 3d and 6th foot with one long syllable. The shorter second line gives the couplet a sense of falling off, thought to impart melancholy.

formed the setting first for lamentations, then for the expression of a vow fulfilled³ though who first sent these tiny 'elegies' into the world is a grammarians' quarrel and still *sub iudice*. Madness armed Archilochus with its own iambus;⁴ [80] that too was the foot that the comic sock and tragic buskin held, because it was suitable for dialogue, able to subdue the shouts of the mob, and intended by nature for a life of action. To the lyre, the Muse granted the celebration of gods and the children of gods, victorious boxers, winning race-horses, young men's love, and generous wine. If I have neither the ability nor the knowledge to keep the duly assigned functions and tones of literature, why am I hailed as a poet? Why do I prefer to be ignorant than learn, out of sheer false shame? A comic subject will not be set out in tragic verse; [90] likewise, the Banquet of Thyestes' disdains being told in poetry of the private kind, that borders on the comic stage. Everything must keep the appropriate place to which it was allotted.

Nevertheless, comedy does sometimes raise her voice, and angry Chremes⁶ perorates with swelling eloquence. Often too Telephus and Peleus⁷ in tragedy lament in prosaic language, when they are both poor exiles and throw away their bombast and words half a yard long, if they are anxious to touch the spectator's heart with their complaint.

Emotion and Character

It is not enough for poetry to be beautiful; it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer's mind wherever it will. [101] The human face smiles in sympathy with smiles and comes to the help of those that weep. If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; *then* your misfortunes will hurt me, Telephus and Peleus. If your words are given you ineptly, I shall fall asleep or laugh. Sad words suit a mournful countenance, threatening words an angry one; sportive words are for the playful, serious for the grave. For nature first shapes us within for any state of fortune—gives us pleasure or drives us to anger or casts us down to the ground with grievous sorrow and pains us—[111] and then expresses the emotions through the medium of the tongue. If the words are out of tune with the speaker's fortunes, the knights and infantry of Rome will raise a cackle. It will make a lot of difference whether the speaker is a god or a hero, an old man of ripe years or a hot youth, an influential matron or a hard-working nurse, a travelling merchant or the tiller of a green farm, a Colchian or an Assyrian, one nurtured at Thebes or at Argos.⁸

Choice and Handling of Myth

Either follow tradition or invent a consistent story. [120] If as a writer you are representing Achilles with all his honours, let him be active, irascible,

3. Horace is thinking of inscriptions accompanying dedications to gods (translator's note).

4. Metrical foot made of one short and one long syllable; iambic trimeter was the measure used in dialogue in both Greek comedies and Greek tragedies. Archilochus (ca. 7th c. B.C.E.), Ionian lyric poet thought to be the earliest writer of iambic verse.

5. In Greek mythology, Atreus murdered his brother Thyestes' son and served the boy to Thyestes, who had seduced Atreus's wife.

6. Miserly character in the comedies of Terence

(Roman dramatist, ca. 190–ca. 159 B.C.E.).

7. Father of the Greek hero Achilles, the central character in the *Iliad*. Telephus: son of Heracles and Auge, wounded by Achilles' spear and cured by its rust.

8. The Argive Agamemnon shows reserve and dignity, while the Theban Creon is a headstrong tyrant. The Assyrian would be effeminate, as compared with the Colchian, but both would be barbarians (Assyria was an ancient empire of west Asia; Colchis bordered the Black Sea).

implacable, and fierce; let him say 'the laws are not for me' and set no limit to the claims that arms can make. Let Medea be proud and indomitable, Iro full of tears, Ixion treacherous, Io never at rest, Orestes full of gloom.⁹ On the other hand, if you are putting something untried on the stage and venturing to shape a new character, let it be maintained to the end as it began and be true to itself. It is hard to put generalities in an individual way: you do better to reduce the song of Troy to acts than if you were the first to bring out something unknown and unsaid.¹ [131] The common stock will become your private property if you don't linger on the broad and vulgar round, or anxiously render word for word, a loyal interpreter, or again, in the process of imitation, find yourself in a tight corner from which shame, or the rule of the craft, won't let you move; or, once again, if you avoid a beginning like the cyclic poet²—

Of Priam's fortune will I sing, and war
well known to fame.

If he opens his mouth as wide as that, how *can* the promiser bring forth anything to match it? The mountains shall be in labour, and there shall be born—a silly mouse. [140] How much better was the way of that poet whose every endeavour is to the point!

Tell me, O Muse, of him who, after Troy
had fallen, saw the manners and the towns
of many men.³

His plan is not to turn fire to smoke, but smoke to light, so as to relate magnificent wonders thereafter—Antiphatas and the Cyclops, Scylla and Charybdis.⁴ He doesn't start the Return of Diomedes from the death of Meleager,⁵ nor begin the Trojan war from the twin egg;⁶ he is always making good speed towards the end of the story, and carries his hearer right into the thick of it as though it were already known. [150] He leaves out anything which he thinks cannot be polished up satisfactorily by treatment, and tells his fables and mixes truth with falsehood in such a way that the middle squares with the beginning and the end with the middle.

Let me tell you what I and the public both want, if you're hoping for an applauding audience that will wait for the curtain and keep its seat until the epilogue-speaker says 'Pray clap your hands'.⁷ You must mark the manners

9. Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra who avenges his father's murder by killing his mother and her lover; he is gloomy because the Furies bound him for the crime of matricide. Medea: enchantress of Greek myth who helps Jason gain the Golden Fleece, and, after he abandons her, murders their children in revenge. Iro: daughter of Cadmus, wife of Athamas; pursued by her enraged husband after plotting against her step-children, she leaped into the sea with her son, Ixion; king who slew his father-in-law and is bound to a perpetually revolving wheel in the underworld as punishment for his attempted seduction of Juno. Io: daughter of Inachus who was loved by Zeus and subsequently transformed into a cow, goaded by gadflies sent by the angry Hera, Zeus's wife.

1. I.e., to invent names and circumstances for a general theme is undesirable; if you object that the known myths are hackneyed, the remedy is in the treatment of them in a new way (translator's note).

2. That is, a poet of the epic cycle, writing poems in Homeric style and usually about events of the Trojan War.

3. *Odyssey* 1.1ff. (translator's note).

4. Characters from Homer's *Odyssey*: Antiphatas, king of the Laestrygonians; Cyclops, Greek mythological giant with one eye; Scylla, half-human sea monster that takes men from passing ships; Charybdis, a dangerous whirlpool in the waters between Sicily and Italy, regarded as a female monster.

5. Uncle of Diomedes, a Greek hero in the *Iliad*, and therefore of an older generation.

6. The offspring of Leda and Zeus were twins, Clytemnestra and Helen; Helen, taken from her husband by the Trojan prince Paris, is usually considered by poets to be the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

7. The comedies of the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence close with *plaudite* (applaud!) or an equivalent phrase.

of each time of life, and assign the appropriate part to changing natures and ages. The child, just able to repeat words and planting his steps on the ground with confidence, is eager to play with his contemporaries, gets in and out of a temper without much cause, and changes hour by hour. [161] The beardless youth, his tutor at last out of the way, enjoys his horses and dogs and the grass of the sunny Park. Moulded like wax into vice, he is surly to would-be advisers, slow to provide for necessities, prodigal of money, up in the air, eager, and quick to abandon the objects of his sudden love. Soon interests change: the grown man's mind pursues wealth and influential connections, is enslaved to honour, and avoids doing anything he may soon be trying to change. [169] Many distresses surround the old man. He is acquisitive, and, poor man, doesn't put his hand on what he has laid up; he is afraid to use it. He goes about his business timidly and coldly, procrastinating, letting things drag on in hope, lazy yet greedy of his future; he is awkward and grumbling, given to praising the days when he was a boy and to criticizing and finding fault with his juniors. Years as they come bring many blessings with them, and as they go take many away. To save yourself giving a young man an old man's role or a boy a grown man's, remember that your character should always remain faithful to what is associated with his age and suits it.

Some Rules for Dramatists⁸

Actions may be either performed on the stage or reported when performed. [180] What comes in through the ear is less effective in stirring the mind than what is put before our faithful eyes and told by the spectator to himself. However, you are not to bring on to the stage events which ought to be carried out within; you are to remove many things from sight, and let them be related in due course by the eloquence of an eye-witness. Don't let Medea murder the children before the people's gaze, or wicked Atreus cook human offal in public, or Procne be metamorphosed into a bird or Cadmus⁹ into a snake. Anything you show me like that earns my incredulity and disgust.

A play that wants to be in demand and to be revived must not be shorter or longer than five acts.¹

[191] There should be no god to intervene, unless the problem merits such a champion.²

No fourth character should attempt to speak.

The chorus should play an actor's part, and do a man's duty. It should not sing between the acts anything which has no relevance to or cohesion with the plot. It should side with the good and give them friendly counsel, restrain the angry, and approve those who scruple to go astray. It should praise a frugal table's fare, sound justice, law, and times of peace when the town's gates stand open. [200] It should keep secrets entrusted to it, and beg and pray the gods that Fortune may return to the wretched and abandon the proud.

8. Most of the precepts enumerated in this section may be found in ARISTOTLE'S *Poetics* (see above).

9. Founder of Thebes; in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus and his wife are changed into serpents. Atreus: father of Agamemnon and Menelaus; he arranged the feast of Thyestes. Procne: wife of Tereus, who punished him for raping her sister by killing her own child and serving him to her husband; later all three were turned into birds.

Development of Tragedy

The flute used not to be, as it is now, bound with copper and a rival to the trumpet. It was slight and simple, with few apertures, but serviceable to accompany and aid the chorus and to fill with its music the still not too crowded benches, where a population of no great size gathered in numbers easily counted, honest and decent and modest. But when that same population won wars and began to extend its territory, when longer walls came to embrace the cities, and people indulged themselves on holidays by drinking in the daytime, and nobody blamed them, [211] then rhythm and tunes acquired greater licence. For what taste could the uneducated show, the holiday crowd of countrymen and townsmen, honest folk and rogues, all mixed up together? This is how the musician came to add movement and elaboration to his art, and to trail his robe as he roamed the stage. This is how even the austere lyre gained a stronger voice, while lofty eloquence produced strange utterance and thought that shrewdly grasped practical needs and prophesied the future grew indistinguishable from the oracles of Delphi.³

Satyr-Plays⁴

[220] The competitor in tragic poetry, who strove for a worthless goat,⁵ next showed the rustic Satyrs, naked. Preserving his seriousness despite his keen wit, he made an attempt at a joke, because the audience, drunk and lawless at the end of the festival, had to be prevented from going away by tricks and pleasing innovations. But the way to recommend your laughing, joking satyrs, the way to turn seriousness to jest, is this: no god or hero you bring on the stage, if he was seen not long ago in royal gold and purple, must lower his language and move into a humble cottage; not, on the other hand, must his efforts to get off the ground lead him to try to grasp clouds and void. [231] Tragedy does not deserve to blurt out trivial lines, but she will modestly consort a little with the forward satyrs, like a respectable lady dancing because she must on a feast day.

As a Satyr-writer, my Piso friends, I shall not limit my liking to plain and proper terms, nor yet try to be so different from the tone of tragedy that there is no difference between Dавus talking or bold Pythias, when she's just tricked Simon out of a talent,⁶ and Silenus; at once guardian and servant of the god he has brought up. [240] I shall make up my poem of known elements, so that anyone may hope to do the same, but he'll sweat and labour to no purpose when he ventures: such is the force of arrangement and combination, such the splendour that commonplace words acquire. Your woodland Fauns, if you take my judgement, should beware of behaving as if they were born at the street corner and were creatures of the Forum—they

3. The oracle of Apollo, and the most important oracle in ancient Greece.

4. These featured Silenus and satyrs in burlesque episodes of myth; style and meter were those of tragedy, not comedy. The piece was commonly performed as a fourth play after three tragedies. Euripides' *Cyclops* (ca. 410 B.C.E.) is the only complete extant example. Aristotle believed satyr-plays were at the origin of tragedy; others, as Horace here, that they were a later refinement (translator's

note). Silenus: male spirit associated with Dionysus, later represented as a drunken old man. "Satyrs": woodland spirits, usually part human, part goat.

5. Horace believes that the Greek term *tragōidia*, literally, "goat song," took its name from the prize of a goat.

6. Typical New Comedy names: slave, maid or prostitute, old man (translator's note).

shouldn't play the gallant in languishing verse or crack dirty and disreputable jokes; possessors of horses⁷ or ancestors or property take offence at this sort of thing and don't look kindly on work approved by the fried-peas-and-nuts public, or give it the prize.

The Need for Technical Perfection

[251] A long syllable following a short one makes an iambus.⁸ He is a quick foot; this is why he ordered iambic lines to be called trimeters, although he was giving six beats to the line, and was the same in form from first to last. Not all that long ago, wanting to fall rather more slowly and weightily upon our ears, he admitted the stately spondee to family privileges—what a comfortable; easy-going foot he is!—but without being quite so complaisant as to give up the second and fourth positions in the line. Rarely does he appear in Accius' noble trimeters, and his rarity in Ennius' [260] weighty lines as they fly out on the stage damns them with the shocking accusation of hasty and careless craftsmanship—or else sheer ignorance of the trade.

Of course, it's not every critic that notices lines that aren't tuneful, and Roman poets have enjoyed undeserved licence. But does that entitle *me* to make mistakes and scribble away carelessly? Or should I rather expect everyone to see my mistakes, and so play safe and cautious, keeping within the bounds of what I can hope to be pardoned for? In that case, all I've done is to avoid blame; I have not deserved praise.

Greek Models

Study Greek models night and day. [270] Your ancestors praised Plautus' metre and his humour. On both counts their admiration was too indulgent, not to say childish, if it's true that you and I know how to distinguish a witless jest from a subtle one and if we've skill in our fingers and ears to know what sounds are permitted.

Inventiveness of the Greeks in Drama

The hitherto unknown genre of the tragic Muse is said to be Thespis' invention; he is supposed to have carried on a cart verses to be sung and acted by performers whose faces were smeared with wine-lees. After him came Aeschylus,² the inventor of the mask and splendid robe; he gave the stage a floor of modest boards, and taught the actors to talk big and give themselves height by their high boots. [281] Next came Old Comedy,³ much praised, though its liberty degenerated into vice and violence deserving restraint of law; the law was accepted, and the chorus fell silent, its right of shameful insult removed.

7. In the Roman Republic, the *equites* (horsemen or "knights") formed a wealthy class almost equal to senators in social standing.
8. Horace's main theme in what preceded was propriety; in the next section it is perfection. He marks the transition by humorously giving some very elementary metrical instruction [translator's note]. A spondee is a metrical foot formed by two long syllables.

9. Roman playwright and literary critic (170–90 B.C.E.).
1. Pioneer of Greek tragedy (6th, c. B.C.E.) who introduced the actor's reply to the chorus.
2. Greek dramatist (525–456 B.C.E.) who introduced the third actor to the Greek stage.
3. The greatest writer of Old Comedy was Aristophanes (ca. 450–ca. 385 B.C.E.).

Inventiveness of the Romans

Our poets have left nothing unattempted. Not the least part of their glory was won by venturing to abandon the footsteps of the Greeks and celebrate our own affairs; some produced historical plays, some comedies in Roman dress. [289] Latium⁴ would have been as famous for literature as for valour and deeds of arms if the poets had not, one and all, been put off by the labour and time of polishing their work. Children of Numa,⁵ show your disapproval of any poem which long time and much correction have not disciplined and smoothed ten times over, to satisfy the well-pared nail.

The Poet

Democritus⁷ thinks native talent a happier thing than poor, miserable art, and banishes sane poets from his Helicon.⁸ That's why so many don't bother to cut their nails or beard, but seek solitude and keep away from the bath. [299] For a man is sure to win the reward and name of poet if he never lets barber Licinus get hold of that head that three Anticyras⁹ won't make sound. I'm a fool to purge my bile when spring comes round. I could write as good poetry as any; but nothing is worth that price, and so I'll play the part of the whetstone, that can sharpen the knife though it can't itself cut. In other words, without writing myself, I will teach function and duty—where the poet's resources come from, what nurtures and forms him, what is proper and what not, in what directions excellence and error lead.

Wisdom is the starting-point and source of correct writing. [310] Socratic books¹ will be able to point out to you your material, and once the material is provided the words will follow willingly enough. If a man has learned his duty to his country and his friends, the proper kind of love with which parent, brother, and guest should be cherished, the functions of a senator and a judge, the task of a general sent to the front—then he automatically understands how to give each character its proper attributes. My advice to the skilled imitator will be to keep his eye on the model of life and manners, and draw his speech living from there.

[319] Sometimes a play devoid of charm, weight, and skill, but attractive with its commonplaces and with the characters well drawn, gives the people keener pleasure and keeps them in their seats more effectively than lines empty of substance and harmonious trivialities.

Greek and Roman Attitudes

The Greeks have the gift of genius from the Muse, and the power of well-rounded speech. They covet nothing but praise. Roman boys do long sums and learn to divide their *as* into a hundred parts.²

4. Area of central Italy that included Rome.
5. Numa Pompilius, half-legendary second king of Rome (traditional dates, 715–673 B.C.E.).
6. From this point, the poem turns to topics concerned with the poet himself: inspiration, moral knowledge, care for posterity, commitment. This main theme continues to the end [translator's note].
7. Greek philosopher (460–370 B.C.E.).
8. Mountain sacred to the Muses.

9. Hellebore, proverbially a cure for madness, came from Anticyra [translator's note].
1. The Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) left no writings, but he was the most important speaker in the dialogues of his greatest pupil, PLATO (ca. 427–ca. 347 B.C.E.).
2. Twelve unciae = 1 as; 5 unciae = quincunx; one-third as = triens; one-half as = semis [translator's note]. An as was worth perhaps 3.

'Young Albinus,³ subtract one uncia from a quincunx: what's left? . . . You could have told me by now . . .

'A triens.
'Excellent. You'll be able to look after your affairs. Now add an uncia. What is it now?'

[330] 'A semis.'

Once this rust and care for cash has tainted the soul, can we hope for poems to be written that deserve preserving with cedar oil and keeping safe in smooth cypress?

Poets aim either to do good or to give pleasure—or, thirdly, to say things which are both pleasing and serviceable for life.

Whatever advice you give, be brief, so that the teachable mind can take in your words quickly and retain them faithfully. Anything superfluous overflows from the full mind.

Whatever you invent for pleasure, let it be near to truth. We don't want a play to ask credence for anything it feels like, or draw a living child from the ogress's belly after lunch. [341] The ranks of elder citizens chase things off the stage if there's no good meat in them, and the high-spirited youngsters won't vote for dry poetry. The man who combines pleasure with usefulness wins every suffrage, delighting the reader and also giving him advice; this is the book that earns money for the Sossii,⁴ goes overseas and gives your celebrated writer a long lease of fame.

However, there are some mistakes we are ready to forgive. The string doesn't always give the note that the hand and mind intended: it often returns a high note when you ask for a low. [350] The bow won't always hit what it threatens to hit. But when most features of a poem are brilliant, I shan't be offended by a few blemishes thrown around by carelessness or human negligence. But what then? If a copyist goes on making the same mistake however much he is warned, he is not forgiven; if a lyre-player always gets the same note wrong, people laugh at him; so, in my estimation, if a poet fails to come off a good deal, he's another Choerilus,⁵ whom I admire with a smile if he's good two or three times. Why, I'm angry even if good Homer goes to sleep, [360] though a doze is quite legitimate in a long piece of work.

Poetry is like painting. Some attracts you more if you stand near, some if you're further off. One picture likes a dark place, one will need to be seen in the light, because it's not afraid of the critic's sharp judgement. One gives pleasure once, one will please if you look at it over ten times.

Dear elder son of Piso, though your father's words are forming you in the right way and you have wisdom of your own besides, take this piece of advice away with you and remember it. In some things, a tolerable mediocrity is properly allowed. A mediocre lawyer or advocate [370] is a long way from the distinction of learned Messalla and doesn't know as much as Aulus Caecilius,⁶ but he has his value. But neither men nor gods nor shop-fronts allow a poet to be mediocre. Just as music out of tune or thick ointment or Sardinian honey with your poppy⁷ gives offence at a nice dinner, because the

3. Roman family name.

4. Booksellers (the Sossii were brothers and well-known booksellers).

5. Minor poet of the 4th c. B.C.E. who accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaigns and was paid to celebrate him.

6. Famous Augustan lawyer. Messalla Corvinus (64 B.C.E.–8 C.E.), Roman political leader, orator, author, soldier, and a patron of the arts.

7. Poppy seeds, when roasted and served with honey, were considered a delicacy; but they were spoiled if the honey had a bitter flavor.

meal could go on without them, so poetry, which was created and discovered for the pleasure of the mind, sinks right to the bottom the moment it declines a little from the top. The man who doesn't know how to play keeps away from the sporting gear in the park. [380] The man who's never been taught ball or discus or hoop keeps quiet, so that the packed spectators can't get a free laugh. But the man who doesn't know how to make verses still has a go. Why shouldn't he? He's free, and of free birth, he's assessed at an equestrian property rate, and he's not got a fault in the world.

You will never do or say anything if Minerva⁸ is against you: your taste and intelligence guarantee us that. But if you do write something some day, let it find its way to critic Maecius⁹ ears, and your father's, and mine, and be stored up for eight years in your notebooks at home. You will be able to erase what you haven't published; words once uttered forget the way home.

Poetry and Its Social Uses and Value

[391] Orpheus,¹ who was a holy man and the interpreter of the gods; deterred the men of the forests from killing and from disgusting kinds of food. This is why he was said to tame tigers and rabid lions. This too is why Amphion,² the founder of the city of Thebes, was said to move rocks where he wished by the sound of the lyre and coaxing prayers. In days of old, wisdom consisted in separating public property from private, the sacred from the secular, in checking promiscuity, in laying down rules for the married, in building cities, in inscribing laws on wooden tablets. [400] And that is how honour and renown came to divine poets and poetry. After them came the great Homer and Tyrtæus,³ who sharpened masculine hearts for war by their verses. Oracles were uttered in verse. The path of life was pointed out in verse. Kings' favours were won by the Muses' tunes. Entertainment was found there also, and rest after long labour. So there is no call to be ashamed of the Muse with her skill on the lyre or of Apollo⁴ the singer.

Art and Nature

Do good poems come by nature or by art? This is a common question. For my part, I don't see what study can do without a rich vein of talent, [410] nor what good can come of untrained genius. They need each other's help and work together in friendship. A boy who wants to reach the hoped-for goal in the race endures and does a lot, sweats and freezes, refrains from sex and wine. The clarinetist who is playing in honour of Apollo learns his lesson first and stands in awe of his master. But nowadays it's enough to say: 'I write marvellous poems. The itch take the hindmost! It's a disgrace for me to be left behind and admit I don't know something that, to be sure, I never learned.'

8. Roman goddess of handicrafts and war, whose attributes became conflated with those of the Greek goddess Athena.

9. Roman author of 12 epigrams of whom nothing is known except his name.

1. A holy man because he founded the Greek religion Orphism. His extraordinary musical powers—said to be able to charm not only wild beasts but also rocks and trees—made Orpheus a model of

the poet.
2. Son of Zeus and Antiope, responsible in part for the miraculous construction of the walls of Thebes.

3. Poet of the 7th c. B.C.E.—according to tradition, a lame Attic schoolmaster—who composed war songs and martial elegies for the Spartans, who sang them while marching.
4. Son of Zeus and Leto, god of music and poetry.

[419] A poet who is rich in land and investments bids his flatterers 'come and better themselves'—just like an auctioneer collecting a crowd to buy his wares. But if he's a man who can set out a good dinner properly and go bail for a poor and impecunious client and get him out of a grim legal tangle, I shall be surprised if the lucky fellow knows how to distinguish a false friend from a true. If you have given a man a present, or if you want to, don't then lead him, full of joy, to your verses. He's bound to say 'Splendid, beautiful, just right'; he'll grow pale here, he'll drip dew from loving eyes, he'll jump about, he'll beat the ground with his foot. [431] Your mocker is more deeply stirred than your true admirer, just as hired mourners at a funeral say and do almost more than those who genuinely grieve. Kings are said to ply a man with many cups and test him with wine if they are trying to discover if he deserves their friendship. If you write poetry, the fox's hidden feelings will never escape you. If you read anything aloud to Quintilius,⁵ he'd say 'pray change that, and that'. You would say you couldn't do better, [440] though you'd tried two or three times, to no purpose. Then he'd tell you to scratch it out and put the badly turned lines back on the anvil. If you preferred defending your error to amending it, he wasted no more words or trouble on preventing you from loving yourself and your handiwork without competition. A wise and good man will censure flabby lines, reprehend harsh ones, put a black line with a stroke of the pen besides unpolished ones, prune pretentious ornaments, force you to shed light on obscurities, convict you of ambiguity, mark down what must be changed. [450] He'll be an Aristarchus.⁶ He won't say, 'Why should I offend a friend in trifles?' These trifles lead to serious troubles, if once you are ridiculed and get a bad reception.

The Mad Poet

Men of sense are afraid to touch a mad poet and give him a wide berth. He's like a man suffering from a nasty itch, or the jaundice, or fanaticism, or Diana's wrath.⁷ Boys chase him and follow him round incautiously. And if, while he's belching out his lofty lines and wandering round, he happens to fall into a well or a pit, like a fowler intent on his birds, then, however long he shouts 'Help! Help! Fellow citizens, help!' there'll be no one to bother to pick him up. [461] And if anyone should trouble to help and let down a rope, my question will be, 'How do you know that he didn't throw himself down deliberately? Are you sure he wants to be saved?' And I shall tell the tale of the death of the Sicilian poet. Empedocles⁸ wanted to be regarded as an immortal god, and so he jumped, cool as you like, into burning Etna.⁹ Let poets have the right and privilege of death. To save a man against his will is the same as killing him. This isn't the only time he's done it. If he's pulled out now, he won't become human or lay aside his love of a notorious end. [470] It's far from clear *why* he keeps writing poetry. Has the villain pined on his father's ashes? Or disturbed the grim site of a lightning-strike? Any-

5. Roman critic of the 2d c. B.C.E.; the name is used here to denote someone with taste.

6. The great Alexandrian scholar [2d c. B.C.E.] marked spurious or doubtful lines in Homer with the sign which Horace here attributes to the good critic [translator's note].

7. Lunacy (as the word's derivation from *luna* suggests).

gests) was supposed to be caused by the moon goddess, Diana.

8. Sicilian philosopher and statesman (5th c. B.C.E.). The actual place and manner of his death is disputed.

9. Europe's highest active volcano, located in Sicily.

way, he's raving, and his harsh readings put learned and unlearned alike to flight, like a bear that's broken the bars of his cage. If he catches anyone, he holds on and kills him with reading. He's a real leech that won't let go of the skin till it's full of blood.

ca. 10 B.C.E.

LONGINUS

first century C.E.

Since the eighteenth century, the ancient Greek text *On Sublimity* has maintained a reputation as one of the most influential classical works in the tradition of European criticism, despite the uncertainty that surrounds its authorship and date of composition. A distinctive feature of this famous treatise is its favorable commentary on the role of emotion (*pathos*) in the practices of writing, oratory, and reading. According to the author of *On Sublimity* (*Peri Hupsous* in Greek), whom critics refer to as "Longinus," the presence of noble passion is essential for achieving sublimity (*hupsos*), by which he means an elevated and lofty style of writing that rises above the ordinary. From Longinus's author-centered perspective, writers and orators achieve greatness not just by rhetorical techniques but also by deep feelings, profound thoughts, and natural genius: "Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind." Often the experience of reading a great author or listening to a great speech leads us to a feeling of ecstasy or transport (*ekstasis*), which is distinct from the more rational effects of persuasion, the goal of rhetoric. For Longinus, sublimity uplifts the spirit of the reader, filling him or her with unexpected astonishment and pride, arousing noble thoughts, and suggesting more than words can convey.

The extant text of *On Sublimity* derives from a tenth-century medieval manuscript that offers conflicting statements as to the identity of the treatise's creator. For unknown reasons, the table of contents attributes the text to either "Dionysius or Longinus," while the title of the manuscript itself simply indicates that a certain "Dionysius Longinus" is the author. The first attribution suggests that the author is either the Augustan Age Dionysius of Halicarnassus or Cassius Longinus, the third-century pupil of PLOTINUS. For various detailed reasons, neither of these alternatives has convinced scholars. The principal argument against Dionysius is that *On Sublimity* does not comport with the style and general approach of his other works, whose authorship is not in question. The main point of contention against Longinus, who in the eighteenth century was universally held to be the author, is that textual evidence taken from the concluding chapter on the decline of literature suggests a date of composition no later than 100 C.E., thus ruling out a third-century author. The title of the manuscript offers no solution either, for nothing is known of a Dionysius Longinus. One of the few things that can be determined with some certainty is that the author must have been a Hellenized Jew or at least in contact with Jewish culture, since the opening of Genesis is cited as a worthy example of sublimity. Such a reference is quite distinctive: no other known pagan writer employs the Bible in this manner. While scholars continue to attribute *On Sublimity* to Cassius Longinus, they do so as a matter of convenience.

Despite seven lengthy gaps that make up approximately one-third of the original text, the intended organization of *On Sublimity* is reasonably certain. After the formal preface addressed to Postumius Terentianus (about whom we know nothing) and the