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Horace's Picture of a Poet

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HORACE'S PICTURE OF A POET

SPECULUM POETAE

BY

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VITA

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INTRODUCTION

It is not often that we find one man combining the elusive characteristics of a poet and a critic. Poetic theory and principles are usually evolved, not by those who synthesize their experience, their observation and their belief into poetry, but by the analysts who reduce to formula the magic ingredients.

If we could go into the function of criticism, we might discover why this is so; but here we can merely accept the fact. For it is this fact which makes us all the more grateful to Quintus Horatius Flaccus, poet and critic of ancient Rome, for possessing both these gifts in an outstanding degree. In addition to four books containing some of the living lyrics of the world's literature, Horace's Epistula ad Pisones, and several other of the Satires and Letters contain maxims of criticism which have served later generations well.

Indeed, Horace has much to tell those who would write poetry. From the Epistula ad Pisones, aspiring writers can

learn canons of taste and technique to improve their work. Realizing this, the men of all periods and all styles, Classical and Romantic, Medieval and Modern, have written and commented copiously on the literary principles of Horace. To Boileau and the French Classical school Horace was guide and mentor. But they saw in him only their own image and likeness, removing all the subtle nuance of style and matter and leaving only the bones of form. Form they sought and found in the Odes, and little more. In their eagerness for rules, they forgot that poetry is written, not by angels or machines, but by men. They forgot that the writing of true poetry is an art, not a mere knowledge of techniques. Yet, not the Classicists alone have loved and appreciated Horace. The Lake poets in England, and the Laureate, Tennyson, ring with the imagery and the music of Horace's alcaics and sapphics¹. Even Byron, who admitted disliking Horace, wrote a paraphrase of the Ars Poetica which shows that of his school training in Horace much remained. And on most of those he meets in the class room, Horace makes an impression, both as a poet and as a man, which seems to grow stronger with the passing of years. Horace's influence lends interest to a study of his precepts concerning poetry. When he speaks of limae labor², we note it down and quote it and try to apply it. When we read all the famous rules for composition drawn from Horace, we nod our

1 H. Popkin, "Horace and the English Romantic Writers", Nuntius, 7, 1943, 81.

2 Q. Horatius Flaccus, Opera, ed. by E. C. Wickham, Clarendon Press, Oxford, Ars Poetica, 291.

our heads and agree. These rules have been discussed and elucidated and contradicted thoroughly. But there is yet something wanting. For poetry is written by the poets and the most important equipment a man can have for the writing of good or great poetry is a character and temperament that fit him for the vocation of poet. When this is ascertained, there is time to enquire as to the instruments he is to use in showing to the world the poetry that is inside him. The picture of a poet, then, will show us a vision of poetry going deeper than the surface interplay of simile and metaphor to some of the characteristics which underlie these. For if the externals are learned by rote, they will be like ornaments on a Christmas tree, gleaming and lovely perhaps, but not as native or as reassuringly natural as a simple pine cone. The man and the poet are not two diverse or hostile people. One makes the other what he is, one influences the other, one is the other. A glance through the gallery of great poets illustrates this. Catullus could write passionate love poetry and coarse invective because his temperament was passionate, and, when frustrated, his love turned to terrible scorn. Virgil's whole life of seclusion and dreams fitted him to dream the wonderful dream called the Aeneid. And our Horace himself could write verse of so many kinds, in so many moods, because the willful and changing fortunes of his life made his moods thus.

So it is the man's self that matters, when he comes to write. And in this thesis it is the man's self that interests us, his ideas, dreams and ideals. For, as Cicero drew the picture of the orator which was a kind of Platonic idea of the absolute orator, so in the works of Horace, we will find delineated many of the traits and qualities necessary for the poet. Then whether or not we accept Horace's ideal, at least it will provide us with a clue to the life and work of Horace himself and of many who have followed him.

CHAPTER I

THE VOCATION OF A POET

Horace felt that the poet is a chosen soul, dedicated to Apollo¹ who is to be his patron and his inspiration. To him there is pertinence in the mention of Orpheus whose miraculous powers tamed lions and tigers, and of Amphion who built the walls of Thebes with song.² For every poet shares in some poor way the miraculous charm of these two. Every poet at least calms the unruly heart and builds the fragile walls of dreams by his song.

In this Horace does not differ from the other critics and thinkers of ancient times; all of them held that without inspiration there is no poetry. A fear of the unsettling influence of inspiration was Plato's reason for excluding poets from his commonwealth.³

Far from explaining by "reason only" the prestige of poetry, the reproach they level at poetic knowledge is precisely that it is

1 Car. I, XXXI, 1.

2 A.P. 391 seq.

3. H. Bremond, Prayer and Poetry, transl. A. Thorold, Burns Oates and Washbourne, London, 1927, I, 7-12.

not founded on reason. For them the poet qua poet having been stripped of his normal self, is clothed with a divine self, he is entheos. They have no doubt whatever of this; they are equally persuaded that this inspiration is wisdom but they suspect and will have nothing to do with a wisdom which owes nothing to labor of intellect, which does not present its accounts, which does not come when called, which is not conscious of itself.

Thus the soul of Plato is torn between the love, the fear and the shame of poetry.

Even Aristotle, on whom the advocates of the so-called "Classical" approach rely so heavily, insists on the role of inspiration in the creation of poetry.⁴ He admits in the poetics⁵ that there are in reality two types of poets, one in which craft surpasses inspiration and the other in which the "fine frenzy" predominates. But in his mind, the greatest poets have never entirely abandoned reason.⁶ And it is precisely here that we seem to find the distinction between the poetic theories of Aristotle and Plato. He [Aristotle] approaches Poetics as a logician, and ... he places poetry, like a syllogism under the absolute yoke of reason.⁷

Plato quarrels with art because in his view it emphasizes and attaches importance to just that sensible side of things which thought must transcend, and so hinders the mind's progress from sensible to intelligible reality, and also because the process by which it reaches immediacy are not trustworthy and are as far as

4 S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts, MacMillan, London, 1932, 397, cf ftnt. 2.

5 Ibid., ftnt. 1.

6 Ibid., 397.

7 Bremond, 17.

possible removed from those logical processes by which truth is attained.⁸

Briefly this quarrel between the emphasis on reason and the emphasis on inspiration is the foundation of the timeless struggle between "Classicism" and "Romanticism", those two much used and much abused terms. The old saying, 'Poets are born, not made', gives us one side of this discussion. The few words we have given on the quarrel do not elucidate the many involved turns it has taken in the minds and works of poets and critics. They are given merely to serve as an introduction to a consideration of Horace's views on this subject. Are poets, according to Horace, made or born? Is poetry the result of inspiration or rather of hard work? The answers to these questions will shed much light on the character which Horace demanded of his ideal poet.

Surely we should not be surprised to find Horace, in this as in all else, taking neither the wide, nor the narrow gate, but finding a middle way which leads him between both. After all, this middle course was nothing more than he recommended in his writings. And Horace's philosophy seems to be nothing more than a projection of his own experience. When he had achieved a modus vivendi, a truce with the strong emotions of life, he offered his solution in his poetry to whoever wanted it.

⁸ A. D. Lindsay, Five Dialogues of Plato on Poetic Inspiration, Everyman's Library, London, 1910, xv.

Following this philosophy of his, Horace takes a view of the poet's mission and manner which is partly Romantic and partly Classical. As Miss Helen C. White says, "By taking thought one may make himself a better poet, but not even the most confident devotees of education would claim, I think, that any man may make himself a poet."⁹ This is a statement with which Horace would, I think, agree. For although he rejects Democritus' theory which

Ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte
Credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas¹⁰

still he often declares the poets debt to the Muses.

And for the rest, He accepts without questioning the doctrine of "poetic inspiration, though his conception of that factor is presumably of a somewhat vague kind. For he regards it as a mysterious force working from without on the poet; and it is a force to which he renders lip-service in his invocations to the Muses. But he is also careful to denounce the current abuses of the doctrine as when he ridicules all pretenders who claim inspiration by reason for their eccentric behavior, or as a result of their devotion to the cup."¹¹

Accepting Professor Atkins' interpretation of the role of the Muses in Horace, we find that he was very conscious of the need for inspiration. If we can judge by the frequency of reference, Horace, when he sat down to write, often breathed a prayer, or at least an unspoken desire that the enthusiasmos of Plato might lend fire and brilliance to his own work. One of the most charming examples of this in the Odes, occurs in III, iv, 1-8,

⁹ H. C. White, The Metaphysical Poets, Macmillan, New York, 1936, 12.

¹⁰ A.P. 295-6.

¹¹ J. W. H. Atkins, Literary Criticism in Antiquity, The University Press, Cambridge, 1934, II, 76.

where Horace says,

Descende caelo et dic age tibia
 regina longum Calliope melos,
 seu voce nunc mavis acuta,
 seu fidubus citharave Phoebi.
 auditis an me ludit amabilis
 insania? audire et videor pios
 errare per lucos, amoenae
 quos et aquae subeunt et aerae.

Here at the start of the fourth of the 'Moral Odes' we find Horace calling on Calliope for inspiration and finding her, unless he be deceived, at his side. And he continues in the same ode saying that no place, no event is beyond his scope, if only the muse be with him.¹² In IV, iii, He thanks Melpomene for the gift of song, saying that it is because of her and her gift that,

Romae principis urbium
 dignatur suboles inter amabilis
 vatium ponere me choros.

Even when we admit that the Muses had little or no reality to Horace as religious figures, there still remains in this ode with its grateful admission that,

Totum muneris hoc tui est,
 quod monstror digito praeterentium
 Romanae fidicen lyrae;
 quod spiro et placeo, si placeo, tuum est.¹³

an acknowledgement of the part that inspiration plays in the formation of a poet. Whatever Horace shall say later about the absolute necessity of hard work, let us recall these words which show that before all hard work is required a substrate of lyric illumination.

¹² Car. III, iv, 21-64.

¹³ Car. IV, iii, 21-24.

When Horace says of himself¹⁴ that he is Musarum sacerdos,⁶ just what does he mean? From the rational tone of his whole published work, we may feel sure that he does not refer to the Musae as bona fide divinities. If this reference, then, is to mean anything more than a mechanical trick for beginning a poem, it must mean that Horace does feel in himself that dedication which is implicit in I, xxxi, 1.

Quid dedicatum poscit Apollinem
vates?

But this dedication seems to be far more to the abstraction which we call 'Inspiration' than to any deity.

For rationalism and superstition had, in the time of Horace, set up their idols in the temples of the old Olympian Gods. The flood of mystery cults and oriental rites brought those who could perceive the continuity of events to a refuge in reason. Those whose minds were not thus trained were frightened into the unthinking degredation of superstition. Astrologers, fortune-tellers and soothsayers of all descriptions had set up shop at Rome. They grew rich out of the insufficiency of the old traditional religion to satisfy the emotional longings of the people. Those who were too wise to be duped by these imposters were yet not wise enough to see that neither in superstition nor in rationalism does the truth lie. For men like these, for the educated, for the philosophers, the poets, the thinkers of Rome, the mystic was laughable, the supernatural was non-existent; there was only

¹⁴ Car. III, 1, 4.

reason.

The awe and reverence which their ancestors felt for an unseen power was the target of Lucretius' terrible and beautiful attack. In his work Lucretius reflected and formed the literate religious opinion of his day.

One feature of the age was restless doubt, acceptance of strange Eastern cults, and a revolt from traditional beliefs and observances. Less than ever could augur meet augur without smiling. Caesar in the Catilinarian debate openly rejected the conception of a future life. Cant was producing the inevitable reaction. The old doctrines were dissolving.¹⁵

Into this milieu Horace came, singing to the Muses and to Apollo, the god of song. Being as he himself said, 'Parcus Deorum cultor et infrequens', we can only believe that the Muses for Horace were the talent and the purely natural inspiration required as a foundation for any poet.

In his own writing, Horace took into consideration that much of his success was due to the mood of the moment, to the brief grandeur of light which clarifies the intellect and directs the emotions and which we call inspiration.

In his theory on the writing of poetry, proposed in the De Arte Poetica, Horace makes this not merely a matter of practice but also a matter of precept. At the same time he shows his emphasis on a quality which differentiates him from the ultra-romantic school. We would find him disagreeing vigorously with

15 J. W. Duff, A Literary History of Rome to the Close of the Golden Age, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1931, 280.

this trend:

For Shelly, poetry is no doubt, creation but primarily revelation. Inspiration comes before everything. A foreign influence seizes hold of the poet, who can neither understand nor control it; a divine power penetrates him, and obliges him to produce certain images of perfection by which he tries to save from the gulf of nothingness which waits for them, these visits of God to man. This is poetry.¹⁶

For Horace, inquiring whether poetry owes its value to nature or to art replies:

..... ego nec studium sine divite vena
nec rude quid prosit video ingenium; alterius sic
altera poscit opem res et coniurat amice.¹⁷

Then he continues with a comparison to a runner who must start his training while yet a lad if he is to win. As Wickham points out in his note on this passage, "Horace poses the old question and solves it in the usual way, that he needs both natural gifts and the training of art.....but as the illustrations show, the point to be insisted on is the second."¹⁸

To insist on the need for talent and to neglect hard work, would not be to follow the mind of Horace in this matter. In fact, it was Aristotle's rigidity and Horace's insistence on rules which brought the militant neo-classicism of Boileau.¹⁹

But we are not to blame the excesses of later disciples on the

16 Bremond, 67.

17 A.P. 409-411.

18 E. C. Wickham, Horace, II, The Satires, Epistles and De Arte Poetica, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1903, 377.

19 Bremond, 18, and Duff, 534.

himself. His emphasis on hard work must certainly have been required in an age when

..... excludit sanos Helicone poetas
 Democritus, bona pars non unguis ponere curat,
 non barbam, secreta petit loca, balnea vitat.
 nanciscetur enim pretium nomenque poetae,
 si tribus Anticyris caput insanabile numquam
 tonsori Licino commiserit.²⁰

This ludicrous picture of the "artistic temperament" untrammelled and gone-to-seed shows us Horace's reason for demanding that the ideal poet have, not only talent, but energy, self-control and the courage to work hard under criticism.

And these, among others, are the qualities he demands. To Horace the poet is no lily of the field blown by the passing breath of inspiration. No, choose what workaday image you will, what figure of energy and toil to describe the poet; and Horace will agree with you.

..... Vos, O
 Pompilius sanguis, carmen reprehendite quod non
 multa dies et multa litura coercuit atque
 praesectum decies non castigavit ad unguem.²¹

Limae labor et mora are necessary if the poet is not to offend, and even after he has written his works often, he must be content, as Horace was, with a few intelligent readers.²²

Ludentis speciem dabit et torquetur....²³

What a true and terrifying picture these five words give of the

20 A.P. 296-301.

21 A.P. 291-294.

22 Serm. I, 10, 72

23 Epp. II, 2, 124.

poet. Wedded to an art which seems easy to all, he is on the rack of self-criticism, and of constant revision. The person who has attempted the writing of Alcaics of Sapphics will realize the accuracy of Horace's picture. Horace's criticism of Lucilius is only that, while he was much more careful than the other early Latin poets, he still left too many blots in his work. Yet in the heat of composition even Lucilius would often scratch his head in perplexity, looking, apparently, for the right word.²⁴

And Horace's is the sensible attitude toward poetry. No one claims that without training and hard work and revision men can write symphonies or drama or epic poetry, to say nothing of the other fine arts, such as architecture. Why then should the poet, and more especially the lyric poet, claim or receive an exemption from the universal rule. Horace claimed none himself, and he would extend none to his ideal poet.

There are several factors beside his common-sense philosophy which contributed to the formation of Horace's creed of hard work. One of these was the literary environment of his time, which was odorous with the lush growth of Alexandrinism. To Horace, this movement was by nature repugnant, and he felt obliged to do all in his power to counteract it. Another of these factors was his position at court during the time when he

24 Serm. I, 10, 67-71.

wrote all the works which chiefly concern us. It seems to be axiomatic that laureates are somewhat tamed by circumstances into a certain formalism.

These two factors worked together. As exponents of the subjective, esoteric view of literature and life, the Alexandrine poets fell under the disapproval of Augustus who was attempting to build an unified Empire, not to foster individualistic geni. Horace, as Augustus' spokesman, found that he was encouraged to follow his own bent in condemning the excesses which were cloaked under the name of inspiration and in advocating the craftsman's attitude toward literature.

A third factor might be sought in the legalistic, rhetorical cast of the Roman mind. As Grenier says, "The chief faculty of the Roman people was power of assimilation."²⁵ The Romans could organize, could construct, could place stone on stone; but the stones were quarried in Greece or Asia or elsewhere. It was the Roman triumph that she made of the world a unity, the world of words as well as of men. She built well, but she created little.

For her world, Rome chose material which had a use. Her forte was not ornamentation. "He (the Roman) did not allow pure reason; he always held fast to the practical reason."²⁶

25 A. Grenier, The Roman Spirit, Knopf, New York, 1926, 387.

26 Ibid., 398.

It is this pragmatism, which Grenier so emphasizes, which led Horace to insist on the value of the work of the file. He, like Rome herself, "subjects the life of the mind to laws which are not of the mind ... deprives it of its independence and is prematurely concerned with the practical results of thought. It looks in science (and, we might add, in art) for possibilities of action, and subordinates the search for the unknown to respect for what exists."²⁷ Poetry, like everything else at Rome, had work to do. It had practical results to obtain. And so, along with all the other useful arts, it had to have rules. These Horace gave it.

Because of this practical function of poetry, the Roman and the Horatian view of the end of poetry differs radically from other views on this same subject. One modern author says that the end of poetry is the perception which is "Joyous possession"²⁸. Quiller-Couch tells us that "poetry's chief function is to reconcile the inner harmony of man (his soul, as we call it) with the outer conception of the universe"²⁹ And Coleridge would seem to speak most clearly for the moderns when he says, "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth"³⁰.

27 Ibid., 397.

28 H. McCarron, S.J., Realization, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1937, 42.

29 A. Quiller-Couch, Poetry, E. P. Dutton, New York, 1914, 25.

30 Smithberger and McCole, On Poetry, Doubleday Doran, New York, 1930, 161.

In theory, Horace does not seem to differ too widely from these definitions, for he says, sic animis natum inventumque poema iuvandis³¹. This would seem at first glance to set the essential perfection of poetry as pleasure, and not mere bodily pleasure, not merely the sensuous delight of rhythm and cadence, but the pleasure of the soul. If we were to believe that this quotation represented the entire opinion of Horace on the matter of the end of poetry, we should be tempted to believe him a Romanticist. And, indeed, some of his own odes seem designed for no other purpose than the pleasure of the soul. For instance, the Pyrrha ode³², the Fons Bandusiae³³, the Poscimus³⁴, and in general the love odes and several of the odes of friendship do give this pleasure and seem to have no end but this.

But the majority of the odes and all the satires and epistles conform much more to that other dictum of Horace, Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci³⁵. Seldom do we find Horace writing without some didactic purpose. The Utile is a major part of his work. It is not enough that a poem be beautiful, it must be also sweet or persuasive, he tells us³⁶. No, for Horace, beauty is not enough. We find little of the ecstasy of pure poetry in Horace and little desire to achieve it. He is

31 A.P. 377.

32 Car. I, v.

33 Car. I, xx.

34 Car. I, xxxii.

35 A.P. 343.

36 A.P. 99.

satisfied if, like Orpheus, Amphion and Homer, he can help in the process of civilization, that is, in the advance of Rome and her way of life.³⁷

This attitude we might expect from a laureate, bound as he was in the chariot of empire; but in Horace it is deeper than that. In Car. I, IV, one of the most springlike odes, he pauses to teach Sestius the lesson that life is terribly short. In the Otium divos³⁸, he tells of the blessings of frugality. To Postumus he laments the fleetness of life. He exhorts Licinius³⁹ to choose a middle course in life. Aequam memento, he cries to Dellius who receives a sermon on the inevitability of death⁴⁰. Sallust is warned against avarice⁴¹.

Can this be accident, this preoccupation with the moral lesson in things? It would seem not. Rather is it the outcome of Horace's conviction that the useful must be joined to the pleasant in order that poetry may attain its purpose. This litany of lesson, of warnings, of admonitions was not, we may feel sure, dictated entirely by Maecenas or Augustus. Rather it came from the mind which Rome had formed in Horace. We may well apply to Horace the words with which Grenier describes Propertius,

37 A.P. 391-403

38 Car. II, xvi

39 Car. II, x

40 Car. II, iii

41 Car. II, ii

By a tendency which was natural in Rome and was strengthened by the trend of ideas in the age of Augustus, the poetry of Propertius assumes a moral purpose; it subordinates beauty to use.⁴²

This subordination of beauty to use was the correct statement of the end of poetry. Its purpose was to mirror forth the aspirations of the Roman people and the Roman emperor for a new golden age; but this golden age was concerned, not with abstract and absolute values but with concrete, relative values. If the Roman spirit at this time was concerned with finding a compromise with life, surely the poetry of Horace was the poetry of Rome.

This useful purpose of poetry was one which Horace made his own and because of it, he assigned greater importance to hard work rather than to inspiration. Of his ideal poet he asked a willingness to advance the practical good of the reader through poetry; and a capacity for hard work so that the rules, so necessary for a predictable finished product, might be observed.

Truly the vocation of a poet was to be a hard-working teacher, distilling from the beauty around him lessons for the edification of the reader and ultimately for the glory of Rome.

42 Grenier, 277.

CHAPTER II

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A POET

Many a man might have the energy or the motivation to work hard at the writing of poetry. Many might catch something of the "divination of the spiritual in the things of sense" which Maritain mentions¹, something of the "Perception of spiritual correspondence"² which Lionel Johnson calls the essence of poetry.³ Yet, is this enough to make a poet? Is it enough that before the slow shadowing forth of green on a willow tree a man feels awe and wonder? Is it enough if in the presence of beauty man feels the symptoms which Houseman describes, "...my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another which consists in a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes"?⁴

Horace certainly did not think so. In addition to the perception of beauty, Horace would demand other qualifications. To

1 J. Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, Scribners, New York, 1921, 96.

2 L. Johnson, Post Luminium, Macmillan London, 1911, 88.

3 Ibid., passim.

4 A.E. Houseman, The Name and Nature of Poetry, Macmillan, New York, 1933, 46.

see as a whole the picture of a poet which Horace draws, we must see the poet translating the beauty which he feels, the experience which has stirred him, into language which will affect others.

The first in importance of these qualifications is wisdom. Horace devotes a long passage in the Ars Poetica to this point:

Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons:
rem tibi Socraticae poterunt ostendere chartae,
verbaque provisam rem non invita sequentur.
qui didicit patriae quid debeat et quid amicis,
quo sit amore parens, quo frater amandus et hospes,
quod sit conscripti, quod iudicis officium, quae
partes in bellum missi ducis, ille profecto
reddere personae scit convenientia cuique.
respicere exemplar vitae morumque iubebo
doctum imitatore[m] et vivas hinc ducere voces.

Evidently when this was written Horace had reconciled poetry and philosophy. Earlier he had said:

nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono;
quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis
in hoc sum;
condo et compono quae mox depromere possim.⁶

He had put aside verse to study philosophy only to discover that philosophy formed the best preparation for writing. We have seen Horace reject the idea of Democritus that a poet should be insane. Now he asks more than that. He asks that the poet, like Tennyson's Ulysses, become 'a part of all that he had known', a font of wisdom at which lesser men can drink.

From the Socraticae chartae, and, especially we may con-

5 A.P., 309-318.

6 Epp. I, i, 10-12.

jure, from the works of Plato, the poet is to garner the subject matter for his efforts. He need not worry about words if only he has a fitting subject. Then Horace enumerates the things which the poet should know, concretely and almost prosaically. We have difficulty seeing how knowledge of the duties of a general sent into war can help make a poet wise. Horace seems merely to be asking that his poet have a fund of universal knowledge; and to care nothing for wisdom as we understand it. For in our sense wisdom is not opposed to ignorance, but to mental blindness.

We can define wisdom as the perception of things or events in their temporal, social, religious, intellectual and personal context and in their relation to the totality of things.

This is a great deal to ask of any man. And the question immediately arises, Is Horace asking this or anything like it? Not precisely this perhaps, but it does seem that when he tells the poet to gaze at the model of life and its manners (and what a lot of understanding is implied in the word mores), he is aiming at something like true wisdom. From Plato the poet can learn the theory of life, the ontological substrate and the principles which govern action. From life he can learn what principles and truths mean in practise. Thus he can perform what Quiller-Couch calls "Poetry's Chief Function", i.e. "to reconcile the inner harmony of man (his soul, as we call it)

with the outer conception of the universe".⁷

This is not an easy ideal. The Muse gave the Greeks an initial interest in art. The Roman must turn his interest from sums and account if his verses are to be worthy to be preserved in the polished wood of the cypress.⁸ The Roman must work hard if he is to become wise. Yet this is the very advice Horace gives him, for the beginning and font of all poetry is wisdom.

With Horace, if we can judge by his own works, much of this wisdom was to be expressed in what we know as didacticism. It was to aid the function of poetry which he emphasized so much - the prodesse. As we have seen, few of the modern critics or poets would admit this formal teaching to be a part of poetry; but in so far as "a poem in the first place should offer us new perceptions, not only of the exterior universe, but of human experience as well; it should add, in other words, to what we have already seen",⁹ there is no poem which does not teach.

For this transference of experience, whether it be in precept or in concept, wisdom, the wisdom which Horace asks, is necessary above all. Except for telling the poet to watch life and use it and its customs as his model, Horace gives little advice on how to attain this wisdom. True, he tells us that from the Iliad we can learn much of life, quid virtus et quid

7 Chap. I., 9.

8 A.P. 323-332.

9 Y. Winters, Primitivism and Decadence, Arrow Editions, New York, 1937, 1.

sapientia possit.¹⁰ But for the rest, we have life itself for our teacher. Horace himself learned what he knew of wisdom from this source.

In the maturity of his powers, he looks back on his past experience as a process of education; while he is ever striving to realize to his own mind how he stands in the present, and in what spirit he is prepared to meet the chance and the certainties of the future.¹¹

It is because of this wisdom that Horace's own appeal has been lasting.

... to those who seek in the study of great poets to gain some temporary admission within the circle of some of the better thoughts, the finer fancies, the happier and more pathetic experiences of our race, he is able to afford this access. To each successive age or century, he seems to express its own familiar wisdom and experience ... to each individual as a familiar friend.¹²

Fundamental then, in the make-up of Horace's ideal poet, is this quality, this habit of wisdom.

Along with this goes another qualification without which a man can hope to be no more than a versifier. And that is a divine discontent, a rigid self-criticism, and dissatisfaction with anything which is not the very best. In other things, Horace tells the young Pisones, a man who is just moderately good has a fair chance of success but:

10 Epp. I, ii, 17 seq.

11 W. Y. Sellar, The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age, Horace and the Elegiac Poets, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1899, 5-6.

12 Ibid., 4.

..... mediocribus esse poetis
non homines, non di, non concessere columnae.¹³

Not only is such a mediocre poet displeasing to the gods and to the critics; but the booksellers will have no use for him. So the motives for striving necessary to achieve success are three, the disapproval of those for whom poetry is meant, [homines], the waste of a talent [di], and the very practical motive that even poets must sell if they are to eat [columnae].

This feeling of dissatisfaction has been known by the greatest of poets. Since the time of Horace, years have made it a commonplace among writers and in text-books of writing. The advocates of untrammelled, unrevised writing are few and seldom successful. But it is from Horace that much of the respect for revision and the admiration for careful work stems. Over and over again in his work, he gives this advice and his practice confirms his precept.

Distrust the advice of friends, he tells the writer. If you would know the truth go to a critic who is moved by no feeling of affection. He gives us several pictures of poets who are wealthy enough to reward their friends and so find their verses praised:

..... clamabit enim 'pulchre! bene! recte!'
palescet super his, etiam stillabit amicis
ex oculis rorem, saliet, tundet pede terram.¹⁴

¹³ A.P. 372-3.

¹⁴ ibid., 428-430.

Such praise he compares to the enthusiasm of skills at an auction or hired mourners at a funeral.¹⁵ And the clever thrust must have gone home to many of the wealthy versifiers at Rome.

If you were to show the verses to Quintilius, the tale would be quite another:

.....'corrige sodes
hoc' aiebat 'et hoc': melius te posse negares,
bis terque expertum frustra, delere iubebat
et male tornatos incudi reddere versus.
si defendere delictum quam vertere malles,
nullum ultra verbum aut operam insumebat inanem,
quin sine rivali teque et tua solus amares.¹⁶

This whole section of the Ad Pisones would tell the young sons of Piso the necessity of revision and change if the work is to be worth anything. He lists some of the faults to be guarded against, - sluggishness, harshness, lack of polish, pompousness, obscurity, and ambiguity¹⁷. For, though these might to a friend seem to be trifles, actually they will bring scorn down upon the poet. There is little room left for self-satisfaction after such an enumeration of dangers and faults.

He tells his readers

nec virtute foret clarisve potentius armis
quam lingua Latium, si non offenderet unum
quemque poetarum limae labor et mora. Vos, o
Pompilius sanguis, carmen reprehendite quod non
multa dies et multa litura coercuit atque
praesectum decies non castigavit ad unguem.¹⁸

15 Ibid., 419-437.

16 Ibid., 438-444.

17 Ibid., 445-452.

18 Ibid., 289-294.

We see here some hint of the care of a Virgil who did not want the work of his lifetime to be published because he had not reworked it entirely nor finished its revision.

This standard is not entirely relative to the acceptance of the work, however. He admits that not every judge sees when a poem lacks harmony. Merely because the patriotic pride of the audience accepts inferior work because it is Roman does not mean that it is worthy of a poet. The poet is working, not only to gain fame, but to image forth the beauty that is in him. In addition to the debt that he owes to the reader, the debt to the Muse, that is his own talent, is greater.

tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva;
 id tibi iudicium est, ea mens. si quid tamen olim
 scripseris, in Maeci descendat iudicis auris
 et patris et nostras, nonumque prematur in annum,
 membranis intus positis: delere licebit
 quod non edideris; nescit vox missa reverti.¹⁹

Stringent rules these, to give to a young poet. For even if we allow for rhetorical exaggeration and the exigencies of rhythm, nine years is still a long time to wait before publishing. And again the note of correction appears! With Horace, this idea of revision seems to have been almost the idee fixe.

In the Epistles again he says that the good poet, the ideal poet of the picture, will change and cut out and polish and move words around 'quam vis invita recedant'.²⁰ Horace's own ideas

19 Ibid., 385-390

20 Epp. II, ii, 109 ff.

show the result of such revision and care. The 'curiosae felicitates' of which we hear so much from those who love Horace can only be the product of hard work. 'Simplex munditiis'²¹, 'male pertinaci'²², 'dum loquimur, fugerit invida aetas'²³, 'aere perennius'²⁴, 'Tu frustra pius, heu, non ita creditum poscis Quintilium deos'²⁵, 'splendide mendax'²⁶. These and so many others show the beauty of the right word in the right place. We cannot imagine another word in their place.

The exigencies of the alcaic metre which is an artificial and sophisticated form make it far from easy to write, a form comparable to many of the more involved French metric forms. Yet Horace had used this form to express many of the deeper, truer emotions, sacrificing nothing of thought to form. Two stanzas from the third ode in the second book will illustrate this more perfectly than any words:

quo pinus ingens albaque populus
unbram hospitem consociare amant
ramis? quid obliquo laborat
lympha fugax trepidare rivo?

huc vina et unguenta et nimium brevis
flores amoenae ferre iube rosae,
dum res et aetas et sororum
fila trium patiuntur atra.²⁷

Surely poetry like this is sufficient argument in favor of

21 Car. I, v, 5.

22 Ibid., I, ix, 24.

23 Ibid., I, xi, 7.

24 Ibid., III, xxx, 1.

25 Ibid., I, xxiv, 11-12.

26 Ibid., III, xi, 36.

27 Ibid., II, iii, 9-16.

Horace's advice to his ideal poet to work slowly, to revise often, to publish only in the fullness of time.

These two, wisdom and care, are the chief qualifications which the writer of poetry must have if he is to be successful. Without them it is hard to see how any man can be more than a hasty, fly-by-night versifier, an Edgar Guestian mawer of sentimental commonplaces.

There are, however, other qualifications which, though not as important as these in Horace's eyes still merit a mention. One of these is a love of seclusion and the life of the country as opposed to the crowded hectic life of Rome. He describes²⁸ for us the life of a Roman, the visits to be made, readings to be attended. An almost Juvenalian picture of the streets, congested with builders' carts, funerals, mad dogs and exaggerates, but does not change the fact that at Rome the recollection necessary for poetry was almost impossible. He goes on:

i nunc et versus tecum meditare canoros.
 scriptorum chorus omnis amat nemus et fugit urbem,
 rite cliens Bacchi somno gaudentis et umbra;
 tu me inter strepitus nocturnos atque diurnos
 vis canere et contracta sequi vestigia vatum?²⁹

This advice looks sound and has, indeed, been followed by many. Yet it seems scarcely true to say that the whole chorus

28 Epp. II, ii, 65-75.

29 Ibid., II, ii, 76-80.

of writers flees the city. Neither in Horace's time, nor in our own, nor in any age between, have all the greatest geniuses lived in the country. Even Horace himself, despite his advice, has been characterized throughout so many centuries as both urban and urbane. As Sellar says, "There was no quality more cultivated by the Romans than urbanity, and the type of that quality in their literature is Horace himself"³⁰.

Yet this is no contradiction. Rather we see here two sides of the same coin. When Horace says:³¹

O rus, quando ego te aspiciam? quandoque licebit
nunc veterum libris, nunc somno et inertibus horis,
ducere sollicitae iucunda obliviae vitae?

There are two things to notice, first that he seems genuinely to yearn for the calm and ease of the country; and secondly, that he is writing from the city. There was a part of Horace devoted to each. He had lived too long at Rome to be content for more than a short while away from the glamor and excitement of court life. But now and again he would grow weary of gossip and long meals, the legibus insanis³², and sigh for the simple fare and the simple life which he knew as a boy.

O quando faba Pythagorae cognata simulque
uncta satis pingui ponentur holuscula lardo?³³

Several of his best odes treat of this same subject:

30 Sellar, 178.

31 Serm. II, vi, 60-62.

32 Ibid., II, vi, 69.

33 Ibid., II, vi, 63-65.

ille terrarum mihi praeter omnis
 angulus ridet, ubi non Hymetto
 mella decedunt viridique certat
 baca Venafro,
 ver ubi longum tepidasque praebet
 Iuppiter brumas, et amicus Aulon
 fertili Baccho minimum Falernis
 invidet uvis.³⁴

He owes his song to the country side at Tibur:

sed quae Tirur aquae fertile praefluunt
 et spissae nemorum comae
 fingent Aeolio carmine nobilem³⁵

But in the very next line it is the praise of the Romans, that is, of the City of Rome, of which he boasts. No matter where he wrote, still it was for the citizens of the city for whom he wrote.

Romae principis urbium
 dignatur suboles inter amabilis
 vatum ponere me choros³⁶

How much of Horace's love for the country was merely a poetic gesture in support of the Augustan reforms, it is hard to say. Wight Duff considers the love for the country one of the most genuine things about Horace.

Horace's interest in the country has been described as that of a townsman. This view fails to account for the glowing praises of Tibus and other places in Italy. Tibur was a passion with him ... His life of nature was not merely derived from a sense of change from city worries, although that counted, no doubt; it was without the philosophic, almost religious, content of Virgil's attitude. But

34 Car. II, vi, 13-20.

35 Ibid., IV, iii, 10-12.

36 Ibid., IV, iii, 13-15.

Horace's admirably vivid descriptive touches can come only from loving observation.³⁷

And Sellar says:

If we ask what was the secret of his deepest happiness, the answer which his odes supply is that it was his love of his Sabine farm and the other favorite spots in Italy, and in the consciousness of inspiration and the practice of his art associated with them.³⁸

Feeling, then, as he did, that inspiration came easiest and truest in the country, sub umbra³⁹, is it any wonder to us that in his prayer to Apollo⁴⁰ he should ask for nothing exotic or rare, merely

me pascunt olivae,
me cichorea levesque malvae.
frui paratis et valido mihi,
Latœ, dones, at, precor, integra
cum mente, nec turpem senectam
degere nec cithara carentem.⁴¹

Is it any wonder that, having loved the country so much, he advises the young poet:

I nunc et versus tecum meditare canoros.
scriptorum chorus omnis amat nemus et fugit urbem.⁴²

Nor is the true poet greedy for possessions.

..... vatis avarus
non temere est animus; versus amat, hoc studet unum.⁴³

In other words, like Horace himself walking down the Via Sacra,

37 Duff, 539-540.

38 Sellar, 180.

39 Car. I, xxxii, l.

40 Ibid., I, xxxi.

41 Ibid., I, xxxi, 15-20.

42 Epp. II, ii, 76-77.

43 Ibid., II, i, 119-120.

he is totus in illis⁴⁴. If so often he advises his friends to avoid avarice lest it draw them from the study of philosophy⁴⁵, or lest it take away their joy in possession⁴⁶, the poet, above all, should avoid it.

For avarice causes anxiety:

non enim gazae neque consularis
 summovet lictor miseros tumultus
 mentis et curas laqueata circum
 tecta volantis.
 vivitur parvo bene, cui paternum
 splendet in mensa tenui salinum
 nec levis somnos timor aut cupido
 sordidus aufert.⁴⁷

and anxiety is fatal to the writing of good poetry. For peace did Horace bid his poet flee the city and go to the country; but this will effect nothing if he takes the cares of avarice with him. The words quoted above hoc studet unum show that the chief care of the poet should be with his writing. He gives us in the next line a picture of a poet with an ivory-tower attitude who only smiles at losses, fugitive slaves, and fires. Of course, even the most abstracted of writers might do more than smile if his house caught fire; but Horace wants to bring out his point clearly to the reader. The poet must give up his desire to gain money and popularity. For though the poet may be a favorite with the gods, he will still be envied by the crowd and attacked by

44 Car. I, xxix, 13-16.

45 Ibid., II, ii.

46 Serm. I, ix, 2.

47 Car. II, xvi, 9-16.

the critics.

nostra sed impugnat, nos nostraque lividus odit⁴⁸

In the fourth book of the Odes he says:

Et iam dente minus mordeor invidio⁴⁹,

which indicates that previously he had not found favor with all, and that even at the end of his literary life, when he wrote the fourth book of songs, some at Rome still envied and disliked him.

scire velis mea cur ingratus opuscula lector
laudet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus:
non ego ventosae plebis suffragia venor
impensis cenarum et tritae munere vestis;
non ego, nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor,
grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor⁵⁰

This is Horace's code in this matter, a real independence of public opinion, and this he recommended to anyone who would succeed in being a true poet. Horace went on his way writing as he would, content in the immortality which time would bestow, caring little for the praise or blame of the grammarians and of the crowd. In this matter, he could say Odi proganum vulgus et arceo⁵¹ and offer it as a principle to all young writers.

These four qualifications then Horace demanded of his model poet, wisdom, literary idealism, love of nature, and independence. Others he mentioned in passing; but with these for his equipment, added to the inspiration and the hard work which we discussed in the first chapter, success will find a broad path to his door.

48 Epp. II, i, 89.
49 Car. IV, iii, 16.
50 Epp. I, xix, 35-40.
51 Car. III, i, 1.

CHAPTER III

THE INSTRUMENT OF A POET

Ancient literature did not have any school of writers who denied that the function of words is to convey ideas. To the classical mind, words, if they had no meaning, had no value. They were differentiated from the media of the other arts by the fact that through words ideas are directly conveyed. This strict factual attitude again was a part of that kind of mind which more easily loses itself in materialism than in idealism. This was the Roman attitude.

Horace's interest in words was, as we might expect, intense. For him words were the raw material out of which poetry is made; and he tried by his example and precept to show the use of words and to give some rules of good taste in this regard. In a country so subject to foreign influences as the Rome of Horace's time, it is not strange that many men adulterated the purity of their own language with foreign importations. The reason is still more evident when we consider the relative poverty of Latin itself in color-words, in abstractions and especially in that kind of adjectives which lends itself to the writing of poetry. Latin was the language of the lawyer, not the lover, of the historian, not

the poet. So, for many of its lighter moods Rome turned to the Greeks.

The debt of Roman writers to their Greek predecessors is a commonplace of the text books. The Romans themselves did not attempt to deny it. Satire they claimed for themselves, but nothing more. But even in the imitation of the Greeks, there must be a mean and this mean Horace attempts to give us. Resist the temptation to display your erudition by writing in Greek, he tells the young poet, by narrating a dream of his own.

Atque ego cum Graecos facerem, natus mare citra,
versiculos, vetuit me tali voce Quirinus,
post mediam noctem visus cum somnia vera,
'in silvam non ligna feras insanius ac si
magnas Graecorum malis implere catervas.'¹

The wisdom of this advice is evident and needs no comment except to mention that we can see the results of composition in a foreign language in the works of some of the modern imagists.² Such work lacks authority and polish, and, except in rare cases, value.

But this was not the chief danger at this time at Rome. Rather did Horace fear those members of the literati whose poems were full of Greek words and transliterations as the "Cantos" of Ezra Pound are dotted with French and Italian, and Chinese ideographs in our own time. Even granted that the effects sought by the author are legitimate, it may be questioned whether the means

¹ Serm. I, x, 31-35.

² cf. for example, T. S. Eliot, Poems, 1909-1925, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1926, 63.

chosen represents more than a tour de force. Horace certainly did not think so:

'at magnum fecit quod verbis Graeca Latinis
miscuit.' O seri studiorum! quine putetis
difficile et mirum, Rhodio quod Pitholeonti
contigit?³

Poetry is not prose, where a lawyer may use any means possible to win the case of his client.⁴ Borrowing from the Greek, if it is to be undertaken at all, must be done with good taste.

He declares, for instance, against the liberties taken by the "new poets" and more especially against their excessive borrowings from the Greek. It was an affectation which led to writing of a macaronic kind; and at an early date Horace had expressed his dislike for this incongruous mixture, while recognizing that a happy blend was capably of charm, as was a skillful mixing of Falernian wine with Chian. On the other hand he is alive to the pressing need for a richer poetic vocabulary; and he asserts the poet's right to adopt new words in current use, or to create others out of Latin roots on the analogy of the Greek, in order to express ideas for which no equivalent existed in Latin.⁵

But what was this good taste? What quality differentiated between original Roman writing, and a second-rate imitation of the Greek. Here is what he says:

in verbis etiam tenuis cautusque serendis
dixeris egregie notum si callida verbum
reddiderit iunctura novum.⁶

This is the first principle, not to fill a poem with exotic and scarce-intelligible verbiage, but taking old familiar words, to

3 Serm. I, x, 20-23.

4 Ibid., I, x, 23-30.

5 Atkins, 81.

6 A.P. 46-48.

combine them in such a way that they seem new. With a callida iunctura link together the everyday words and make them fit for the message which poetry would convey. This is not easy. But as we have seen, Horace did not claim that the writing of real poetry would be easy. Is it rewarding: does it achieve its end? If we may judge by the works of Horace himself and of the great poets since his time, the answer is overwhelmingly, yes. The odes are written in the language which Cicero and Tacitus used. New words are few, yet because Horace labored to combine his words as he advises his poet to do, the odes ring with the music of true poetry.

In the third stanza of the Fons Bandusiae:

Fies nobilium tu quoque fontium,
 me dicente cavis impositam illicem
 saxis, unde loquaces
 lymphae desiliunt tuae.⁷

There are no words which surprise us. Yet note the perfection of the adjective loquaces to express the babble of Bandusia's waters. But more than any one word, it is the combination of 'i' sounds which gives so much of the liquid sound of water to the stanza. The letter 'i' or 'y' occurs fourteen times. Yet there are only common words, commonplace words used to achieve the effect which Horace desired. They are joined by the hand of a master.

There is a wealth of suggestion in the use of candidus to modify the breezes of spring⁸. It is the shining word to ex-

⁷ Car. III, xiii, 13-16.

⁸ Ibid., III, xii, 1.

pressing the shining newness of the season. To call the years, "Fugaces"⁹, a wife, "placens"¹⁰, to say that "ille terrarum mihi praeter omnis angulus ridet"¹¹, or to say that

omnes eodem cogimur, omnium
versatur urna serius ocius
sors exitura et nos in aeternum
exsilium impositura cumbae.¹²

is to use words according to Horace's own precept. He has used the words of ordinary speech and made of them poetry.

When we compare these epithets and passages to the exaggerated diminutives and Graecisms of Catullus, vetuli, flosculus, integellum, libellum, labella, basiationes, febriculosi, turgiduli,¹³ we see how much Horace made out of the cold, formality of Latin. Later on the elegists wandered even farther from the conversational tone of the odes, and from their work we come back to Horace to be refreshed and delighted by his simplicity. Yet he is not monotonous. With his instrument he has fashioned songs of love, of patriotism, of nature which do not pall. We are reminded at once of Housman's poignantly plain melancholy, of Wordsworth's delight in nature and of the almost casual glory of some of Shakespeare's sonnets.

For the greatest poets have not needed the color and flame of imagery to bring their meaning to the reader.

⁹ Ibid., II, xiv, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., II, xiv, 21.

¹¹ Ibid., II, xi, 13-14.

¹² Ibid., II, iii, 25-28.

¹³ cf. Carmina, 27, 24, 15, 14, 8, 7, 6, 3.

We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on; and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep

I must not think of thee; and tired yet strong,
 I shun the thought that lurks in all delight.

Had we never loved so kindly
 Had we never loved so blindly,
 Never met, and never parted,
 We had n'er been broken-hearted.

There are simple words, short words, the words of daily life.
 But through them rings the pathos, the tragedy of poetry. It was
 such words as these that Horace himself used and had his model
 poet to use.

Horace continues in the same passage on the use of words:

si forte necesse est

indiciis monstrare recentibus abdita rerum,
 fingere cinctutis non exaudita Cethegis
 continget, dabiturque licentia sumpta pudenter;
 et nova fictaque nuper habebunt verba fidem si
 Graeco fonte cadent, parce detorta.¹⁴

We contrast this with the passage quoted above ridiculing those
 who considered it a great feat to use many Greek words. But
 Horace is not contradicting himself. In one place he complains
 about the excessive and unnecessary use of Greek words. In the
 present citation he takes care of all the conditions which govern
 the employment of foreign words. First of all existing language
 must be inadequate for the expression of something new, secondly,
 new words must be used pudenter, which we might translate,
 subtly, thirdly, they must be employed only parce. With these
 three conditions Horace removes the danger of pedantry, of need-

14 A.P. 48-53.

less display, and of obscurity.

The next point which is taken up is the fact that as the seasons of the year change, so the currency of words varies.

multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque
quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi.¹⁵

The poet must take this fact into consideration if his work is to be intelligible. He must realize also, that in the use of words as in all other things, he should look to fitness. The comic character should not use the solemn speech of the tragic hero, nor the tragedian mumble with the tongue of a merchant.¹⁶ This is an important lesson in good taste which should be learned early. From neglect of it have resulted such dubious performances as the early English miracle plays which relegated holy characters to the place of mere clowns, and some sections of Plautus in which the switch from comedy to pathos is so sudden and unaccounted for as to leave the audience bewildered.¹⁷

In speaking of the satyric drama, Horace again refers to this need for appropriateness of language:

ne quicumque deus, quicumque adhibebitur heros,
regali conspectus in auro nuper et ostro,
migret in obscuras humili sermone tabernas,
aut, dum vitat humum, nubes et inania captet.¹⁸

Although in most of this Horace refers to the drama, there is

15 A.P. 70-72.

16 Ibid., 89 ff.

17 cf. The Towneley Plays, Nichols, London, 1836.

18 A.P. 227-230.

little doubt that he meant the same principles to apply to a change of subject matter in other forms. The language of the odes varies in mood and tone from that of the epistles and satires. Chaucer's Prioress speaks quite another brand of English from that of the Millere. Kipling's language changes from the dust and sun of "Gunga Din" to the solemn pomp of "Recessional". This is what Horace means.

The right choice of words demands of the poet rigid self-discipline; no matter how he feels about a certain word, if it be out of place, it must go.

audebit, quaecumque parum splendoris habebunt
 et sine pondere erunt et honore indigna ferentur,
 verba movere loco, quamvis invita recedant
 et versentur adhuc intra penetralia Vestae;
 obscurata diu populo bonus eruet atque
 proferet in lucem speciosa vocabula rerum,
 quae priscis memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis
 nunc situs informis premit et deserta vetustas;
 adsciscet nova, quae genitor produxerit usus;
 vehemens et liquidus puroque simillimus amni
 fundet opes Latiumque beabit divite lingua;
 luxuriantia compescet, nimis aspera sano
 levabit cultu, virtute carentia tollet,¹⁹

Atkins says²⁰:

Here he was condemning all hackneyed and colorless words, not the simple direct words of everyday speech; though centuries later the passage gave support to the neo-classical demand for an artificial diction, as was seen in the effected periphrastic speech of eighteenth century verse.

Commenting in another place on this same passage, Atkins says²¹:

19 Epp. II, ii, 111-123.

20 Atkins, 80.

21 Ibid., 83.

Your good poet, when he begins to write will assume also the spirit of an honest censor. He will exercise judgment in his choice of words, discarding those that are undignified, bringing back old-fashioned, picturesque terms once used by Cato and Cethegus, adopting new words that have been sanctioned by usage or custom, at the same time raising language to a higher power by processes of pruning and refining.

Such is Horace's answer to the question of poetic diction. Should there be a special diction, special words for poetry? No, answers Horace, not if this is to mean artificiality and obscurity. Should the diction of poetry differ from the diction of prose? Yes, in so far as it is more precise, more picturesque, briefer, more charged with emotion. In this way he avoids the extravagances of purple patches, of wildly picturesque words, and at the same time he escapes the jejune barrenness of some of the modern versifiers. We must not think that Horace wished to treat this matter theoretically, considering both sides and weighing them. What he tried to do was to give practical precepts, not to critics and savants, but to those who were attempting to write poetry.

In this connection, Horace would, I think, make the same distinction which Professor Lowes makes between connotation and denotation.²² We have no difficulty making this distinction in English poetry:

22 J. L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt, Chap. V, "The Diction of Poetry Vs. Poetic Diction", Constable, London, 1938, 180 ff.

The difference then between the diction of poetry and that of prose depends on a difference between the functions of words in two mediums. The business of words in prose is primarily to state; in poetry, not only to state, but also (and sometimes primarily) to suggest. In such prose words may be used for their exact, precisely delimited meaning alone, speaking only to the hard clear intellect. Any blurring of their sharp definiteness by vague or especially by emotional associations, intrudes at once a disturbing influence. The terms must be cold as a diagram ... words in scientific prose are used for their denotation. They must suggest nothing beyond the rigorous exactitude of their sense ... But in poetry ... the suggestions, the connotations of words - that constitutes in large degree the very stuff out of which the poet works.²³

The modern reader labors under the difficulty of not feeling the connotations of Latin and Greek words. Often indeed even the denotation is gotten only after struggle with a dictionary. We do not know the relation of words to the Greek, - to Sappho, to Alcaeus, to the early Romans, to Ennius and Terence. We can not know the indefinable scent of marketplace or farm which followed this or that word for the Roman reader.

If, two thousand years from now, some foreign reader were to come upon the word "bitter-sweet" in an English verse, it might convey to him an oxymoron or the name of a certain "shrubby or climbing plant with green flowers succeeded by orange pods that display a red aril" as the dictionary tells us. To him the "bittersweet" would not bring the autumn and the scent of burning leaves and the days of frost and sun. To him this "shrubby

plant" would not be the emblem of summer's dying or the symbol of heartache and sadness. It would be merely a word to be translated into some foreign tongue carrying with it no picture, no connotation.

If, then, the words of Horace on poetic diction seem barren and fruitless, let us recall that he was not deliberately cutting the Roman poet off from the sources of beauty. He was rather bidding him to look around and find the beauty for his work in the nuances, in the recollections, in the shadows of everyday words.

The Ars Poetica begins with one of Horace's counsels on the mode of expression, which is famous.

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam
iungere si velit,
.....
credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum
persimilem cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae
fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
reddatur formae. 'pictoribus atque poetis
quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas.'
scimus, et hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim;
sed non ut placidis coeant immitia, non ut
serpentes avibus gementur, tigribus agni.²⁴

This is a Summa of Horace's advice on expression as well as on good taste. It is told in a metaphor; but no one who wanted to write poetry could have any doubt as to its meaning. For it is another plea for moderation and good taste. These two were the

24 A.P. 1-13.

guiding canons when we considered words and their use; they will be important in this section. By using the metaphor of painting, Horace managed to include all these elements which make up a poem without naming each individually. Mood, language, meter, emotion, - all these must be in keeping with the whole piece or else it will not be art.

Many an Alexandrine versifier must have been dismayed at the treatment given to the maxim, "pictoribus atque poetis quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas." What a blow would this give to all those schools which deny the objectivity of art and make the artist the rule of his work. The general truth of the saying, if properly understood, Horace does not deny. He is glad to take advantage of it himself. Horace is attempting to avoid a species of literary surrealism. The tiger of technique must not be joined to a lamblike subject or mood. The subtlety of the serpent accords poorly with the dove of a gay, childlike subject. We realize the inappropriateness of such mixtures when we find the evening described as "a patient etherized upon a table", or when we find Magdalen's eyes called "two portable baths", or when we find the Alexandrines writing small but serious epics on such subjects as insets and obscure passions of obscure dieties.

Horace surely accords with our own common-sense judgment when he bids the young poet avoid such excesses. All through this tractate on expression which continues for one hundred and

twenty lines of the Ars Poetica, the emphasis is on avoidance of excess in various parts of the process of composition. "Choose a subject which is within your powers" we are told²⁵. If we do this we will not lack words or clear order. For the true beauty of order in a poem consists, not in saying all beautiful things, but in expressing these which befit the occasion.²⁶

Horace next mentions some rules for use of words which we have treated in the first part of this chapter, all of which fit in with the general thesis of moderation and fitness. Meter demands the same care and thought as the other elements of a poem. Tradition has long assigned various meter to various subjects and without offense to the audience the young poet cannot change them. Whether we agree with this dictum or not, we should realize that Horace did not mean to exclude variety. Certainly nothing of variety of mood or treatment is lacking in his own use of, for example, the alcaic stanza. Horace followed the general rules for the form; but within the framework which he had chosen, he painted many different pictures.

In a long section on expression in tragedy, Horace merely continues this advice and applies it to the construction of tragedy and comedy along more or less Aristotelian lines. He pleads for correct meter to befit the diverse types. Then he says one of the brilliant things which have always endeared the

25 Ibid., 38-40.

26 Ibid., 70-82.

Ars Poetica to critics. He bids the poet:

si vis me flere, dolendum est
primum ipsi tibi: tunc tua me infortunia laedent,
Telephe vel Peleu.²⁷

These words apply not only to the drama but to every form of poetizing. Even now this plea for sincerity in emotion makes us wonder at the wisdom of this man who lived in an age of polite insincerities such as we find in Ovid and the Elegiac writers. And splendid advice it is. Even Wordsworth, the prophet of the "Romantic" movement would agree:

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity; the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins...²⁸

Simplicity and the power of making the most difficult work seem easy is the truest sign of an artist.

.ut sibi quisvis
speret idem, sudet multum frustra que laboret
ausus idem.²⁹

Byron imitates this bit in his Hints From Horace³⁰.

Whom nature guides, so writes that every dunce
Enraptured thinks to do the thing at once;
But after inky thumbs and bitten nails,
And twenty scattered quires, the coxcomb fails.

27 Ibid., 102-104.

28 W. Wordsworth, Complete Poetical Works, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1904, 796.

29 A.P. 240-242.

30 Poems and Plays of Lord Bryon, Everyman's Edition, Dent, London, 1930, I, 256.

Similar are the words which we have quoted before, "ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur".³¹ The important point is that the work must not show through and make the whole work redolent of ink eradicator. Rather the work must seem, though it will seldom be, the result of a sudden moment's inspiration. The value of this precept we see from an examination of the odes and from a personal effort at imitation of them. The difference will convince any Latinist that smoothness in such composition is difficult, but necessary. Housman describes most amusingly this difficulty of making the works fit the concept:

One more (stanza) was needed, but it did not come. I had to turn to and compose it myself and that was a laborious business. I wrote it thirteen times, and it was more than a twelve-month before I got it right.³²

Yet when we examine the poem³³ we cannot surely tell which of the stanzas took so much time and labor. Seemingly they all flow with that effortless ease which Horace advises his Poet to cultivate.

In two brief lines Horace gives a warning which all teachers of literature give to their students:

quidquid praecipies esto brevis, ut cito dicta
percipiant animi dociles teneantque fideles.
Omne supervacuum pleno de pectore manat.³⁴

He does not here outlaw all long poems; but merely points out

31 Epp. II, ii, 124.

32 Name and Nature, 49-50.

33 A. E. Housman, A Shropshire Lad, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1896, #68.

34 A.P. 335-337.

that when the mind has had its fill, it can take no more, no matter how long or how lovely the work should be. If the Poet follows Horace's rule of fitness, he will proportion length to subject matter and so avoid the difficulties suggested by this rule. In another place³⁵ after commenting on the very real value of humor in presentation, Horace again pleads for brevity:

est brevitare opus, ut currat sententia, neu se
impediat verbis lassas onerantibus auris.³⁶

These are Horace's chief precepts to the young poet concerning expression. Logically, he only carries further principles already enunciated as fundamental. Many things he did not think to say; but what he said, concerning good taste, congruity, sincerity, subtlety, brevity and proportion - have lost none of their pertinence. Whatever the language, the period, the school, these will always apply. For they are rooted in the common-sense of mankind so that no desire for revolt, for novelty will justify the poet who throws them over.

³⁵ Serm. I, x, 7-8.

³⁶ Ibid., I, x, 9-10.

CHAPTER IV
SOME LACUNAE

Horace's picture of a poet is by no means complete. It is a sketch, hastily drawn in which only the foreground is clear. Of the background which give depth and tone to the whole, Horace says almost nothing. For Horace was not an interpreter of life; but an artist of living things and people. His poetry is the poetry of the foreground. His criticism is the criticism of the foreground. And both flow from his manner of thought which dealt with the concrete present, eschewing the misty past and the problematical future.

Little did Horace say of the nature of man which is the basis for all discussions of the poetic experience. He cared rather for "human nature" that far more colorful, tangible immediate entity. To other, to Lucretius, to Virgil, even to Cicero, he left discussion of cosmic, general truths. For him the truth of present pain or rapture, the beauty of Tibur, the figure of Augustus were enough. Therefore, his colors were the vivid primary tints; these were capable of expressing vivid primary emotions. Despite his casualness, Horace was not sophisticated in his reactions. His joys were simple joys and his sorrows were

not complex.

Yet he was a product of his times. His living and his poetry were conditioned by the triumph of Octavius and by the dream of the Empire. We find in Horace something of the narrowness of Rome which called itself simply, urbs, and make the wonders of the orient and the wastes of the occident mere tributaries of a port on the Adriatic. That things outside of Rome could be other than tribute seemed unlikely in the ages when the empire ruled the world. From a poet who felt more kinship with the world we would expect far other poetry and far other criticism.

The last force which affected the work of Horace, adding some lines to his portrait of a poet, was the stream of Hellenistic, and therefore pagan culture which had become the heritage of Rome. This culture, though it sprang from polytheistic beginnings, had become rationalistic and material. Lucretius, it seemed, had pulled the gods from their heights; leaving reason supreme in the temple of the world. And Horace, although undoubtedly "in favor of" religion [as witness his Odes] based what theory of poetry he had on the mind and natural talents of man. We have said something of Roman pragmatism earlier; here we merely want to point out that some of the most notable lacunae in his poetic theory are the result of the paganism of Horace.

Any discussion on the vocation of a poet must logically start with a thorough and real knowledge of just what poetry is.

This is not to say that the final word of this has been said or will ever be said; but merely to say that the writer should have an integrated theory of the nature of poetry, which, although not definitive, will be coherent and logical.

But no theory of poetry stands alone. It is only a part of a man's entire philosophy; and depends greatly on what the principles of that philosophy happen to be. An idealistic philosophy with its denial of matter will lead to far other poetic conclusions than either the exaggerated realism of Plato, or the moderate realism of Aristotle.

It is not the logical, but the metaphysical background of poetry which distinguishes the realistic poetry of Chaucer from the nominalistic poetry of the imagists and impressionists. It is an entirely different concept of man which prompts the dramas of Euripides and those of Aeschylus. The poetry of Catullus was the poetry of sensism, while that of Lucretius was intensely intellectual. The "moral" value of a man's work, which we cannot deny, though we might find it difficult to define, varies according to the philosophy which motivates him.

Horace was conscious of the moral purpose of poetry. He bade the poet be sure to miscere utile dulci; but he seems to have taken it for granted that the utile for all would be considered by them to be the same as his. And in this, he erred greatly. We have only to look at the whims and vagaries of poets

since his time, their advocacy of art for art's sake, their hedonism, their abandonment to sense to realize Horace's error. For these poets have not abandoned the teacher's mantle; they have lent their talents to teach doctrines which they thought useful, but of which Horace would have disapproved heartily.

Indeed, the almost casual exhortation in the Ars Poetica to to study the Socraticae chartae was not enough. In the press of practical rules for composition it is quite lost and its importance not stressed. The Pisos, and students since then, could have found it as easy to disregard as the rules for the number of actors. Horace would not have wanted this. Yet, because his philosophy itself was a tradition, rather than a well-rounded system, he gave the aspiring poet only this somewhat jejune advice.

This is not to say that the poet should give way to the philosopher in our picture. Horace himself was not a profound or original thinker. Yet he had his own philosophy of the golden mean, a philosophy of the foreground, but one which covered the foreground well. Professor D'Alton described this philosophy:

In the De Officiis, Cicero...applies the law of Decorum to the regulation of human conduct. As I have already said, that law is grounded in the concept of the golden mean which is our surest guide in life. Whether in speech or dress, it calls upon us to avoid the excesses of effeminacy and boorishness. In expense or display, it will prevent us from going to a vulgar extreme, and in our dealings with our fellow-men will help us to keep our emotions under control. The law of propriety above all demands a uniform consistency in

each single action and in our life as a whole. Man must be true, not only to his own individual character, but, as the Stoics especially would insist, to the universal laws of human nature. From these a social sense is developed which imposes on man his most solemn duty, and helps to discipline his instincts within proper limits. A community will have its established customs, and conventions to which its members must conform, if its existence is to be assured.¹

How weak this is we can see, when we pit the force of man's passions and emotions against the "social sense" which is fostered by the Law of Decorum. For Horace, it was sufficient; for others, unless backed up by something more ultimate, either philosophy or religion, the Law of Decorum would prove sadly inadequate.

Horace's religion was not a serious element in his treatment of poetry. Instead of providing a strong, solid background for his moral principles, it too was a matter of the foreground, a public policy of value only because of its restraining influence on lawlessness. Augustus, it is true, favored a return to the ancient forms of religion; but this was a matter of policy which did not affect greatly those who advocated it most strongly.

Consequently, nowhere in the literary epistles does Horace make the point that the man of letters, and especially the poet, should be a man of religion. Perhaps this was not clear to him: he had, after all, a firm foundation for his morality and con-

¹ J. F. D'Alton, Roman Literary Theory and Criticism, Longmans, London, 1931, 369-370.

sidered that others would have the same. But when a man's philosophy is such a relative, subjective thing as Horace's Law of Decorum, nothing in it guarantees permanence. It is only the eternal truths of religion, whether that religion be Christian or pagan, which can stabilize a moral code.

For, in the final analysis, art, though it moves in a different sphere than prudence, is not entirely independent. The purpose of language is to convey ideas; and ideas should conform to truth. Distinctions we may make between "poetic truth" and "logical truth" and "ontological truth", for there are distinctions. No one demands that poetry assume the accuracy of a scientific treatise, or the dogmatism of a text-book. Yet, if we divorce the ideas of the poet completely from the order of reality, we shall promote chaos of thought and of living. Horace's picture of a poet is by no means complete. It is, as every work of art must be, conditioned by the man and the times.

A case might be made for the notion that some poetry is amoral. A lyric, taken out of context, may yield a beauty whether or not we agree with its basic assumptions. But any poem taken in context, studied, in other words, in the light of the considerations which were important to the author has a didactic quality which we cannot ignore. This is, of course, notably true in an author so conscious of the teaching mission of the poet as was Horace.

os tenerum pueri balbumque poeta figurat,
torquet ab obscenis iam nunc sermonibus aurem,
mox etiam pectus praeceptis format amicis,
asperitatis et invidiae corrector et irae²

and again,

orientia tempora notis
instruit exemplis inopem solatur et aegrum³

Speaking of the mission of the early poets, he notes the same point,

fuit haec sapientia quondam,
publica privatis secernere, sacra profanis,
concubitu prohibere vago, dare iura maritis,
oppida moliri, leges incidere ligno.
sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque
carminibus venit.....
.....
dictae per carmina sortes,
et vitae monstrata via est⁴

Professor D'Alton, after showing that in ancient times the ethical view of poetry was prevalent, points out that Horace followed the trend,

Apart from other considerations, the Augustan critic felt bound to defend an art which had been based by the numerous poetasters of the time, and to show that such a levis insania could make some contribution to the commonwealth. Hence he sets forth the civilizing influence of poetry in the primitive condition of the human race. He defends the Old Comedy and Satire, on the ground that they perform a useful service to society. He moreover invests the poet with a religious sanction as a priest of the Muses, and presses poetry into the service of religion. The worthy poet is the guardian of virtue and can guide the young into paths of goodness. The function that Horace assigns the Chorus is preeminently a religious and moral one. The poet can draw his best material from

2 Epp. II, i, 126-129.

3 Ibid., II, i, 130-131.

4 A.P. 396-404.

the Socraticae chartae which will teach him especially the various duties of life.⁵

philosophy and religion were allied to poetry, but what a philosophy, and what religion!

Horace, whose odes, as we have seen, are now and then consecrated to the restoration of religion, was every whit as secular minded as Cicero. He laughed at superstition and ridiculed the idea of a divine interest in men, when he expressed his own feeling. No one was ever more thoroughly Epicurean in the truest sense of the word; no one ever urged more pleasantly the Epicurean theory Carpe diem; no one ever had more deeply ingrained in him the belief mors ultima linea rerum est. His candour, his humor, his friendliness, combine to give him a very human charm, but in all that is associated with the religious side of man's thought and experience, he is sterile and insufficient.⁶

When we read a description of Roman religion in the early empire, we can understand why Horace did not demand that his ideal poet be a religious man.

In the first place it may safely be said that this strange medley of Greek and Roman ideas, of popular folk-lore and the abstract speculations of philosophers, would certainly not have appeared unnatural to an Augustan reader. We never hear of any outcry against Virgil's 'unorthodoxy', and the same mingling of conceptions meets us in contemporary poets: in Horace with a more marked note of scepticism, in Ovid with the added savour of flippancy.⁷

The literary appeal of such a religion is obvious. Virgil spun a beautiful tale about it; Horace used it as it suited his mood. But of its ethical value we may share some doubt with Augustus

⁵ D'Alton, 487.

⁶ T. R. Glover, Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire, Methuen, London, 1909, 10-11.

⁷ C. Bailey, Religion in Virgil, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1935, 306.

himself who desired eagerly a return to the simple beliefs of the ancient Romans.

If it seems foolish to demand religion of a poet in view of the blatant agnosticism of many prominent poets since Horace's time, we should recall that some of them disavowed any didactic or moral purpose in poetry, and so freed themselves to some extent from criticism on this ground. They wrote, as it were, to be read out of context. But the great majority of those who professed no religion lived still in the great stream of Christianity, and were influenced, although unconsciously, by the Christian ethic.

We may complain that Horace demanded no settled ethical standards from his poet beside the varying and fugitive golden mean. We can only regret that because of the divine plan, he had not the Christian ethic to offer and to demand from the Pisos and those who would come after. For the gulf between the Christian concept of the purpose of poetry, its meaning, its beauty, and the Pagan concept is one which only the divine poetry of the Redemption could cross. How was the concept so changed? Only by showing again the true ordination of the world which had almost been forgotten after the fall.

Man's prolonged, impassioned quest for truth came to fruition in the knowledge that here was the Truth incarnate before his eyes, not merely as a personified abstraction, but as the Way by which he might enter upon its fullest knowledge and the Life whereby he might truly begin to be. For the first time in the history of the human

race, after so many centuries of aspiration and endeavor, man had come into the authentic experience of Beauty, not in its completeness, since that is reserved for eternity, but certainly the sufficient clarity for him to translate the experience into terms of living, and life so understood into terms of art.

The New Law did not make a new world, but it explained the old.⁸

For the poet of Horace's time, the world was old and very weary. Beauty there was; but it was the sad beauty of death. Lucretius chanted it in his hymn to death. Virgil's whole poem is fraught with hopeless sorrow. Horace tells us that, "vitae summa brevis spem nos vetat incohare longam"; and Catullus in the midst of passion cannot forget that, "nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux, nox est perpetua una dormienda".⁹ The sadness of the poets was full of longing but empty of hope. Horace looking about for advice to give to aspiring poets, found only the sterility of rules for composition.

It was left for the theologians and poets of the Christian dispensation to show that beauty has its truest meaning only as a participation in the eternal, perfect beauty of the Godhead. For them, the loveliness of nature, of man, of works of art in paint, marble or the fragile web of words, - all these have their value. They are truly beautiful. They fill the senses and the mind with joy and peace. Of themselves, to some extent, they do this; but when seen as works from the hand of God, as creatures

⁸ B. Kelly, The Sudden Rose, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1939, 96-7.

⁹ Car. V, 5-6.

of His love and mirrors of His splendour, they take on a new, wonderful beauty unknown and unfelt by Horace.

To the Christian poet is the advice given, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God...." for in a splendid redundancy all things lead to that kingdom and that kingdom in turn leads back to the earthly things which are man's immediate concern. In the field of ethics this doctrine applied to man has led to Christian concepts of love, of family life, of honor, of pleasure. In the field of esthetics, it has given new meaning to the sensible objects with which the artist works. In poetry, especially, it has given a proportion which the ancients lacked. The poet is no longer priest; altars are no longer erected to the god of song. Instead, the poet has become an acolyte in the long procession wending toward God, and poems are so many flowers placed in token of worship before the altar where God dwells. Christianity has taken from the poet his awful task of priest and prophet with its responsibility and its futility. And, in so doing, it has freed him to sing with a happier tone, a lighter heart and words far truer. For now he sees and judges all things in the blinding light of the Redemption.

In Horace's picture, we miss both philosophy and religion, and most of the inadequacy of his foreground sketch comes about because these two are missing. Whether this inadequacy is Horace's fault or the fault of his times and environment and education and heritage, we shall not attempt to define. But we are

saddened by it both because of its effect on Horace's own life, and on his criticism. For excellent as the rules were which Horace laid down, they only serve to highlight the incompleteness, we might even say the superficiality, of the whole.

When we use the word "superficial" of Horace's criticism, we use it only in a comparative sense. Compared to the Christian picture of the poet, it is unsatisfactory; but compared to the rest of ancient criticism, the Ars Poetica and the other literary works shine. Alone of the ancients, excepting Aristotle, Horace has walked the streets of many cities with many generations of poets guiding their footsteps and giving them advice which as Saintsbury says, "when rightly taken, has not lost, nor is ever likely to lose, critical validity".¹⁰

Yet, though as a whole we gladly accept the legacy of Horatian precept, it is only fair to note that "the critical attitude of Horace is a woefully incomplete one"¹¹. And this from a literary point of view, leaving aside for a time, the most fundamental considerations of Philosophy and religion. The chief defect of this type is the intellectual mood of the criticism and in turn, of the picture of a poet. Saintsbury blames this and says: "Except in a few passages....there is no 'soul' in him. He has no enthusiasm, no passion".¹² A. Y. Campbell complains that

10 G. E. Saintsbury, History of Criticism, Dodd, New York, 1902, I, 227.

11 Ibid., 1227.

12 Ibid., 228.

Horace uses an "approach too merely intellectual" and that he was imbued with "the philosophic fallacy, the intellectualistic conception of morals"¹³. Horace, of course, was not so foolish as to deny the need for emotion, for enthusiasm, for verve and delight.

ego nec studium sine divite vena
nec rude quid prosit video ingenium; alterius sic
altera poscit opem res et coniurat amice¹⁴

But ingenium is surely a weak word for the dreams and visions which we expect, though we do not always receive them, from an ideal poet. "Virtue consists in the trinitarian doctrine, as in Cicero's De Oratore, which advocates the perfect blending of these qualities of phusis, melete, episteme. On the other hand, error consists in following the unitarian doctrine of ingenium."¹⁵ All very well, we say, all very well; but what does Horace tell our young poet of the joyous labor of writing. Of the labor, he says much; of the joy, nothing.

Reading Horace, they [the aspiring poets] might be tempted to think of poetry as merely another trade, demanding work, bringing the rewards of fame sooner or later, a prop of government, a channel of propaganda and nothing more. That poetry does these things we do not deny; what we claim is that it does something more, that it gives a personal fulfillment to the author.

¹³ Cf. Car. III, 1-6.

¹⁴ A.P. 409-411.

¹⁵ G. C. Fiske and M. A. Grant, Cicero's De Oratore and Horace's Ars Poetica, University of Wisconsin, 1929, 128.

It brings him a happiness, weary with toil perhaps, but real because it is positive and creative. So many more might have been inspired by Horace's picture, if he had not neglected this element.

"Observe order; do not grovel or soar too high; stick to the usage of reasonable and well-bred persons; be neither stupid nor shocking; above all, be like the best of your predecessors, stick to the norm of the class, do not attempt a perhaps impossible and certainly dangerous individuality". In short the false mimesis-imitation of previous art - is mixing herself up more and more with the true mimesis, representation of nature. If it is not exactly true that, as a modern prose Horace has it, Tout est dit, at any rate the forms in which everything ought to be said have long been found out. You cannot improve on them; try to make the best use of them that you can."¹⁶

In contrast to the words, difficile est proprie communia dicere, we have Horace's endless rules which cover everything from the number of feet in a line to the number of actors on the stage. "Red tape", is Saintsbury's word for it and no matter what we call it, clearly by the time all of Horācé's prescriptions were observed, there was small scope for originality. Men of genius - for Rome had Lucretius and Catullus and Virgil, in addition to Horace - might break through the web of convention to produce original works of art. Or rather they might so diffract the common sunlight through the lens of their mind that the old colors seemed again fresh and new.

Borrowing their materials freely and even lavishly, they build a Roman edifice, often

¹⁶ Saintsbury, 227-228.

less beautiful, perhaps, than its Greek original, but significant of their own character.¹⁷

But what is there of this in the advice of Horace? In his own odes, he created a Roman lyric; but no where does he explain to the Pisos, or to us, what it is to say a thing proprie. Nowhere does he tell them that

a man is individual by reason of very complex characters - to his immediate inheritance, derived from his own ancestors, there must be added the nature of his race, of his race and of his environment and of his society.¹⁸

He does not advise them to widen their experience so that the common thoughts, the common senses will take on new meaning, new relationships with one another. He does not cry out with Tennyson's Ulysses, "I am a part of all that I have met." Yet all experience is an arch wherethro' Gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades Forever and forever when I move." Truly, and unfortunately, of the originality of experimentation Horace says nothing except to discourage; and of the originality of the personal element in poetry, he gives only the barest hint.

Lastly, the advice which Horace gives to the young poet skimps the lyric strangely considering that Horace himself was the chief lyricist of Rome. Many of the general precepts given can be applied to the lyric form, precepts of unity and proportion and decorum. Yet of the lyrical impulse which certainly

17 E. E. Sikes, Roman Poetry, Methuen, London, 1923, 8.

18 Ibid., 7.

guided him when he wrote the "quid desiderio", or the "Quid dedicatum poscit Apollinem", or the Solvitur Acris, he says nothing.¹⁹

Probably this was because there was little real lyric, as we understand it, at Rome. Dedicated to utility, and to the tasks of civilization and empire, the Roman poet had little time to write the personal testimonies, or the half-heard message of the heart.

Whether we widen or limit our definition of lyric, the fact remains that the Roman poets rarely sing. They speak, recite, or even chant; but they do not commonly break out into that ecstasy of emotion which seems to demand music as its medium. Horace himself, though he never lacks the "perfect expression", seldom rises to the "Imaginative intensity". He has no burning moments, no absorbing passion, no thrill of rapture when desire is gratified, no spasm of torture in frustrated hopes. His equal Muse is strange alike to the highest joys and the deepest despair.²⁰

Sikes looks for the explanation of this coldness to the environment,

An urban life, highly artificial and conventional, dominated by good taste, shrinking from any form of eccentricity or excessive self-revelation, could not foster the intensity of personal emotion which overflows in lyrical utterance.²¹

This certainly gives us at least a partial cause of the reason for this lacuna in Horace's poetic theory. But what we are most concerned with is that he did not tell the young poet anything

¹⁹ Car., I, xxiv, xxxi, iv.

²⁰ Sikes, 10.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

of the lyric impulse. What we regret is that devotion to form, ignoring the deeper, more moving, personal part of poetry led eventually to the formalized decay of Roman poetry. Horace had his part in that decay. No matter that many of his own odes were full of lyric beauty. What we are here considering is his advice to one who would write poetry; and of the meaning, the essence, the necessity of lyric emotion he tells the poet nothing.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Henry St. Clair Lavin, S.J.
has been read and approved by three members of the
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The final copies have been examined by the director
of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies
the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated,
and that the thesis is now given final approval with refer-
ence to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

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Signature of Adviser