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Volumina signata

Transforming the Relationship Between Work, Art, and Author in Horace's *Epistles I*

ABSTRACT: The article examines the complex relationship between Horace and his poetic work, focusing on the transformation from the concept of performative lyric poetry to that of written epistles. It highlights the poet's gradual separation from his creation, with the written scroll (*liber*) acquiring ontic status and autonomy. The study emphasizes the shifting paradigm from inspired song (*cantare*) to deliberate writing (*scribere*), portraying Horace as both a vates and a self-conscious artist. Through close textual analysis, it explores the metapoetic dimensions of the *Epistles*, illustrating the evolving concept of authorship and the aesthetic function of the poetic book within Horace's mature poetics.

KEYWORDS: Horace, Epistles, Latin poetry, authorship, poetic book (*liber*), literary self-awareness, poetic voice, *liber* as artifact, authorial persona

The work of Horace became permanently associated with the name of Neoptolemus of Parion thanks to Porphyrio's comment in the introduction to his commentary on the *Ars Poetica*: in quem librum congegssit praecepta Neoptolemi τοῦ Παριάνου de *Arte Poetica*, non quidem omnia sed eminentissima.¹ A remark so laconic has given rise to countless interpretations and philological debates, among which one of the central issues is understanding the meaning of Neoptolemus' triad

¹ Havthall 1866: 649.

poema – *poesis* – *poeta*, which delineates the tripartite division of *techne poietike* in post-Aristotelian poetic theory during the Hellenistic period.² An excellent and largely definitive – though not entirely conclusive, due to the fragmentary nature of the source material – analysis of this problem in reference to *Epistles* II, with particular focus on the *Epistle to the Pisos*, was carried out by Charles Brink. He assigned the following meanings to the terms: *poema* as the technique of metrical composition, restricted to shorter poetic forms or individual verses; *poesis* as the theme or subject of the work and its organization in larger compositions; and *poeta* as poetic talent, creative effort, and aspiration.³ Brink viewed Neoptolemus' conception as an attempt to reconcile Aristotelian poetics – with its emphasis on works of greater structural complexity and serious subject matter (*megethos*) – with rival Hellenistic ideas, particularly Callimachean notions of the “small-scale work”.⁴ Nonetheless, the scholar noted the terminological ambiguity, especially in the case of the lexeme *poesis*, which in Greek treatises and lexicons appears both in an abstract sense and a more concrete one, denoting either the art of poetry or the poetic work as the product of composition.⁵ However, in addition to drawing attention to the integration of ideas, Brink also noted a feature characteristic of the triad in question: an emphasis on the separation of elements, each corresponding to a distinct aspect of the compositional process – even though rhetorical treatises typically treat style and subject matter as distinct in any case.⁶

In the context of Horace's *Epistles*, one also notes the significant separation of the poet himself from both style and subject (or the work),

² Brink 1963: 14–40.

³ Brink 1963: 73.

⁴ Brink 1963: 73. The issue pertains to the broader concept of *leptotes* (in implicit opposition to *megethos*), which reflects the fundamental dichotomy between *genus tenue* and *genus grande*, shaping Horace's notion of *ludus lyricus*, a concept clearly derived from Callimachean poetics, though reworked to serve the aims of “useful” poetry: one that, despite its generic subtlety, addresses weighty moral questions, in contrast to the Hellenistic principle of art for art's sake; cf. Cody 1976: 36–38, 91–92; Santirocco 1986: 34–36; Lowrie 1997: 56–70; Thomas 2007: 52–53.

⁵ Brink 1963: 76–78. It is not without significance that most of the source material – divided by Brink (1963: 55) into twelve one- to three-line passages – has been preserved through Philodemus of Gadara, a critic of this very concept.

⁶ Brink 1963: 70.

highlighted by the passage: [μ]ῆ κοινωνε[ῖν] τῷ πο[ιητῇ] τ[ῷ]ν ἀμα[ρτ]ῶν τὰ[ς] ὑποθέ[σεις] καὶ τὰ ποιήμ[ατα].⁷ This linkage of poetic processes with the poet's capacities – though he is indeed the agent of his craft and possesses the necessary skills and knowledge (*technē*) – nonetheless distances him from potential faults in thematic development or stylistic flaws, particularly in large-scale compositions. What is at issue here is not merely indulgence in the occasional lapses of a “slumbering” Homer, given the monumental nature of the epic (*Ars P.* 358–360; *Sat.* 1.10.50–71), but rather the assertion of a clear separation between the author and both his art and its resulting product.

To modern readers, such ontic distinctness may seem a self-evident truism, scarcely worth noting. However, it must be borne in mind that, alongside Aristotle's ‘realist’ poetics and rhetoric – as well as later theories derived from them – the ancient world also maintained a distinctively Socratic–Platonic framework (or, more broadly, a traditional one found in the works of archaic poets), in which the creator was conceived as an immanent part of the composition: a link in the chain connecting the divine to the audience, precisely through his person and performance.⁸ There was thus no ontic separation between the authorial self and the work itself; or, to put it differently, the inspired individual – filled with the power of the divine – was the ontic foundation of the poetic utterance.⁹

Naturally, the point of departure for such a view lay in the realities of – or rather, in Plato's nostalgia for – oral culture, in which a work preserved in the memory of the poet-performer could exist only in the act of performance. Yet, as Plato illustrates in the *Phaedrus*, the

⁷ “No instances of subject-matter and style have a share in the faults of the poet”; transl. Brink 1963: 58–59.

⁸ Including such motifs as the poet being a child or lover of the Muses (cf. *mousolēpsia*); see Hall 2000: 407–418; Sommerstein 2005: 161–171; Mojsik 2011: 259–269.

⁹ Using the metaphor of a magnet that binds separate metal objects with an invisible force, Plato describes the process of *theophory*, wherein the “force” is the divine presence that permeates the poet and his song, reaching into the soul of the listener (Pl. *Ion* 533d–e; see also *Rep.* 22c; *Ion* 534c; *Menex.* 99c–e; *Phaed.* 245a; *Symp.* 209a–d). Cf. Koppek 2023: 351–352. In article, I employ Roman Ingarden's concept of the ontic foundation of the work of art, which is distinct from the artwork as an intentional object; see Thomasson 2024.

creative act was largely conceived as a kind of improvisation – an act of creation or re-creation performed *ad hoc*.¹⁰ Already at the beginning of the dialogue, toward the end of the passage dealing with self-control and the yielding to passions (the first speech on Eros), Socrates feels the presence of a deity and gradually slips into a kind of creative frenzy, speaking nearly in dithyrambic verse (*Phdr.* 238c–d). As the dialogue progresses, it transforms into a second speech in praise of Eros, culminating in a hymn to true love, within which a poetic apprehension of the divine essence emerges (*Phdr.* 257b). This speech concludes the literary portion of the dialogue, which may be seen as a rhetorical and poetic contest with Lysias' speech. What follows is the analytical part, in which it becomes evident that the poetic sheen of the text was merely a trap for the naïve recipient of the work – Phaedrus. The key issue left unresolved is the ability to discern between the true value of poetry, endowed with depth by divine inspiration, and its mere semblance – that is, a false appearance of value based on decorative, rhetorical, or sophistic glitter.

It is worth emphasizing that the premonition of impending madness – the presence of the divine – is treated in the dialogue with a certain irony. Nevertheless, it is *mania* that distinguishes the truly exceptional poet (*Phdr.* 245a). As Socrates speaks on the assigned topic, he gradually seems to lose control over the structure of his speech, drifting away from prose toward something resembling metrical poetry. Though he never entirely dissolves into it, the divine presence at the margins of both speeches in praise of Eros paradoxically remains an immanent and constitutive element. And although the dialogic form represents an effort to preserve the culture of living speech during the transition to a culture of writing – Plato's own practice being, in fact, the writing of conversation – this predicament does not preclude the retention of a certain mystery inherent in poetry: an insurmountable and irreducible inexplicability of its effect, even though it may be analyzed into its

¹⁰ In his speech in defense of the poet Archias, Cicero presents poetic genius as the ability to improvise: Archias was capable of composing metrical commentaries on current events extemporaneously, while written preparation served only to polish his natural talent (Cic. *Arch.* 8 [18]).

constituent parts. It is as though, in the act of analysis, the divine were to escape from it.

Such an interpretation is closely aligned with the presentation of poetry in Horace's *Carmina*, where *amabilis insania* is treated as an altered state of consciousness in which the poet – the chosen of the gods – participates in both worlds: the divine, through a special communion with the Muse and her song, and the human, where the poet's song resounds as an echo of the ideal one (*Carm.* 3.4).¹¹ At the same time, through the act of singing, the poet surrounds himself with a protective sphere of *sacrosanctitas*, rendering him safe from the attacks of wild beasts (*Carm.* 1.22.9–16).¹² A more detailed analysis of the theme of song in the odes would require a separate study. However, to sketch the background of the present considerations, one must refer to *Ode* 1.6, which – as one of Horace's programmatic poems¹³ – juxtaposes on one hand the concept of *scribere*, and on the other *dicere* and *cantare*. This motif has been explored by Michèle Lowrie, who analyzed song in terms of a temporal division: the “time of singing” – Horace's *hic et nunc*¹⁴ – articulated in the maxim *carpe diem*, and the “time of writing,” or more precisely, of what is written down in accordance with the principle *scripta manent*. Lowrie framed this as a stylistic paradox: the association of serious themes (*genus grande*) with writing and its commemorative function – which ensures the endurance of *res gestae* in history – contrasted with the treatment of light themes (*genus tenue, leve*) through the act of singing. In her reading, the latter reduces to the

¹¹ Nisbet, Rudd 2007: 53–54; Kopek 2023: 3–4. Cf. *Carm.* 1.12.1–16.

¹² Roman 2014: 208–209. In the cited passage from the defense of Archias, Cicero recalls that Ennius referred to poets as “sacred” because they were filled with a divine spirit: “*atque sic a summis hominibus eruditissimisque accepimus, ceterarum rerum studia ex doctrina et praeceptis et arte constare, poetam natura ipsa valere et mentis viribus excitari et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari. qua re suo iure noster ille Ennius ‘sanctos’ appellat poetas, quod quasi deorum aliquo dono atque munere commendati nobis esse videantur*” (Cic. *Arch.* 8 [18]).

¹³ Santirocco 1986: 23–41.

¹⁴ Michèle Lowrie formulated an intriguing *hic et nunc* “principle” that links the ethical maxim *carpe diem* – an exhortation addressed to the recipient to enjoy the moment – with a metapoetic reference to the work that the audience is encountering at that very moment, and with the aesthetic pleasure the work provides in the present; cf. Lowrie 1997: 49–50.

illusory “song of the poet” in a period when the tradition of oral culture had already yielded to writing and the library. While Callimachean poetics continued to employ the metonymy of song for poetry, and the performative dimension of song still granted the poet a kind of “living” presence during performance, his enduring legacy – like the continued praise and remembrance of his patrons’ military and political achievements – depended on writing and its ontic foundation. By rejecting the patron’s demand for personal immortalization and instead advocating a focus on the present moment, Horace affirms a higher ethical principle to which his poetics is subordinated (cf. *Carm.* 1.11).

Lowrie eventually concludes that *Ode* 1.6 reduces to an ironic commentary on the repetitive nature of *cantamus* – since the present moment is always rushing into the future, *cantare* turns out to be a frequentative, even habitual act. Therefore, says the scholar, Horace must submit to the act of writing down his song in order to preserve that ever-vanishing present moment. Herein lies a double paradox: of praise that pretends to be *recusatio*, and of the writing of poetry that pretends to be its singing.¹⁵

Considering the above, the introduction to the *Epistles* invites reconsideration – an opening that, despite numerous readings, continues to provoke interest and raise questions. Much of its meaning depends on how the *Epistles* as a whole are framed, as clearly demonstrated in Phebe Bowditch’s analysis. She situates the *Epistles* within a redefinition of patronage, emphasizing a reversal of its asymmetrical power dynamics in favor of the poet.¹⁶ Naturally, this in no way detracts from the rigor of her scholarly method or the validity of her conclusions. Yet it opens up a different set of questions – ones not concerning the substance of a new “contract” with Maecenas, but rather the mode of the text’s literary construction. These questions emerge from Horace’s own poetics, and particularly from the tension between the “poet’s song” and writing as an alternative, non-performative mode of composition. It is this very tension – and its implications for the *Epistles*’ compositional strategy – that forms the central concern of the present article.

¹⁵ Lowrie 1997: 56–70.

¹⁶ Bowditch 2001: 142–160, 170–173; 205–210; Roman 2014: 213–214, 221–229 and n. 168, p. 226. Cf. Oliensis 1998: 47–48.

The first difficulty arises already in the opening lines of the inaugural epistle:

Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende Camena,
spectatum satis et donatum iam rude quaeris,
Maecenas, iterum antiquo me includere ludo?
(*Epist.* 1.1.1–3)

According to widely accepted readings, the first line is understood as a reference to the beginnings of Horace's poetic career, in which he dedicated to Maecenas the *Epodes* (*Epod.* 1.1–4), the *Satires* (*Sat.* 1.1.1–3), and the *Odes* (*Carm.* 1.1.1–2), as well as to its (as yet) undefined endpoint. Ph. Bowditch translates the verse: "By my first Muse glorified, to be glorified by my last, you, Maecenas..." She further suggests that *dicende* (the future passive participle), in describing the poet's debt to his patron, only seemingly refers to an open-ended future. In fact, it points forward to *Epistle* 1.19, which is likewise dedicated to Maecenas, thereby marking that the debt is soon to be repaid.¹⁷ On one hand, such a reading seems entirely justified; on the other, its particulars do not fully align with the internal context of the *Epistles*, especially given the poet's declared abandonment of lyric poetry in favor of philosophical studies – or more precisely, his search for answers to fundamental questions posed by philosophical and paraenetic literature.¹⁸

Above all, it is important to note the twofold occurrence of the verb *dicere*, which – alongside *cantare* – serves to designate the poet's act of singing in the work of the Venusian (*Carm.* 1.19.9–12).¹⁹ Moreo-

¹⁷ Bowditch 2001: 171: "Although *dicende* might suggest a continuing debt on the part of the poet, such a future obligation, looking ahead to the nineteenth epistle similarly addressed to the patron, has already been met – once the collection of poems is published as a whole – in the temporal unfolding of the poetry book and the reading process: that is, Maecenas has received the first dedication and, rest assured, the line implies, he is to receive the last".

¹⁸ The question of philosophy in Horace's poetry, especially in the *Epistles*, has been widely discussed, although it is also emphasized that his interests extended far beyond philosophy in the strict sense. Therefore, it is important to highlight the role of literature and its allegorical, ethical interpretation (cf. Mayer 1986: 66–73).

¹⁹ Cf. phrase *carmina dicere*, OLD sv. 6b.

ver, the verb is juxtaposed with the noun *Camena* (or *camena*), which, depending on context, may refer either to the Romanized Muse, that is, poetry personified (*Carm.* 2.16.38), or to the song itself (*Carm.* 1.12.39).²⁰ In the *Epistles* I, both *Camena* and *carmen* appear in particularly marked contexts. Outside the first letter, the *Camenae* characterize the poetic activity of the addressee – Lollius, a younger poet – in *Epist.* 1.18. The passage, comprising lines 37–48, recounts the myth of twin brothers with radically different temperaments – harsh Zethus and gentle Amphion – which is here employed as an allegory for the relationship between patron and client-poet. This letter serves as a kind of poetic etiquette guide on how a poet-client should comport himself toward his patron. The poetic labor of the addressee is presented as *poemata pangere* (the composing of poems), and is paralleled with Amphion’s lyre (vv. 42–43) and associated with the *Camenae* – albeit, in Lollius’s case, described as somewhat too somber. The Roman Muses reappear once more in *Epist.* 1.19, in the frame-closing dedication to Maecenas, thereby bookending the collection:

Prisco si credis, Maecenas docte, Cratino,
 nulla placere diu nec uiuere carmina possunt
 quae scribuntur aquae potioribus; ut male sanos
 adscripsit Liber Satyris Faunisque poetas,
 uina fere dulces oluerunt mane Camenae;
 laudibus arguitur uini uinosus Homerus;
 Ennius ipse pater numquam nisi potus ad arma
 prosiluit dicenda. ‘Forum putealque Libonis
 mandabo siccis, adimam cantare seueris’
 (*Epist.* 1.19.1–9)

The *Camenae* are directly associated with the motif of poetic song (*carmen*), and more specifically with the fate of the poet’s first collection of *Carmina*, within a veritable treasury of metapoetic themes: wine linked to Bacchus (*Liber*), poetic inspiration, and creative madness – culminating in the image of drunken Muses in the company of Homer and Ennius (cf. *arma... dicenda*, vv. 7–8). The concentration of such

²⁰ OLD sv. 1b, 2a.

motifs eventually gives way to the traditional division between rhetorical and poetic activity, the latter explicitly marked by the Horatian term *cantare*. The subsequent verses (vv. 21–31) further illuminate the term by referencing the *iambi*, inspired by Archilochus, and the *carmina*, modeled on the meters of Sappho and Alcaeus – poetic forms traditionally performed with instrumental accompaniment and therefore intrinsically linked to the idea of the poet’s song.

Yet immediately a second element of the poetic puzzle emerges – *liber, volumen*:

Hunc ego, non alio dictum prius ore, Latinus
uolgaui fidicen; iuuat inmemorata ferentem
ingenuis oculisque legi manibusque teneri.
Scire uelis, mea cur ingratus opuscula lector
laudet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus
(*Epist.* 1.19.32–36)

Horace moves with remarkable fluidity from the framework of metrical poetry – traditionally intended for oral performance and, in his conception, tied to the prophetic voice of the *vates* – to a “modern” poetic medium: the written scroll (*liber, volumen*), detached from the performer-creator. The new poetic mode is meant for the eyes of the educated, to be read and held in the hand as a physical object – thus marking a transition from performed song to fixed text. In simplified terms, the evolution can be interpreted as a division between the contents of the scroll and the scroll itself; it also foregrounds the scroll as a vessel of authorial intention and a cultural artifact – both material and symbolic – that, once inscribed, begins to detach itself from its maker, laying the conceptual groundwork for its eventual autonomy as a self-contained object of reception and interpretation.

Setting aside for the moment the question of the scroll, it must be noted that Horace rather consistently associates the *Camena* with lyric poetry – or more broadly, with poetic forms traditionally intended for performance accompanied by a musical instrument, as in the case of Homeric epic. A crucial ambiguity emerges here: when Horace, in the opening of the *Epistles*, appears to bid farewell – within the perspective

of the poetic voice at the time – to lyric poetry once and for all, is he in fact alluding to the *Epistulae*? Or does the reference to the “first and last Camena” perhaps allude instead to the first and final odes of the *Carmina* collection – *Carm.* 1.1 and 3.29?²¹ The possibility is further reinforced by the shared portrayal of Maecenas in both odes – as a descendant of kings – a formulation that resonates strongly with the poetic significance of *dicere*, meaning “to praise” or “to celebrate,”²² in contrast to *Epist.* 1.1 and 1.19, where he is merely named. Such a formulation aligns closely with the conception of lyric as public praise poetry, somewhat in the Pindaric mode, endowed with the status of a publicly functioning opus – precisely the kind of work Maecenas demands in *Epist.* 1.1. By contrast, the letter – though not entirely private, as it may be read in transit by almost anyone – requires only the identification of an addressee. Even if read by others, its rhetorical force is directed primarily toward the recipient, which undermines the panegyric function of the gesture. A letter may be an effective means of currying favor with a noble patron – as in the case of Ovid’s exile poetry, where building rapport and common ground is essential – but it cannot compete with Pindaric lyric or epic in constructing a public image.

The main difficulty in interpretation lies in the *participium futuri passivi* (gerundive). As a participial form, it does not indicate an absolute grammatical tense, but rather expresses a temporal relation of posteriority with respect to a governing element, which serves as its point of reference.²³ The key issue here is that the extended vocative clause *Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende Camena [...]* *Maecenas* depends solely on the vocative *Maecenas*; it is not grammatically connected to the rest of the sentence, including the predicate *quaeris*, whose subject is the implied second-person singular pronoun *tu*, identified with the addressee through logical association.²⁴ Consequently, the present-tense verb *quaeris* cannot serve as the temporal anchor for

²¹ The final ode, 3.30, like *Epist.* 1.20, should rather be treated as an authorial epilogue; cf. Santirocco 1986: 132–149; the scholar refers to the phenomenon broadly as “the poetics of closure.”

²² Lewis, Short 1881: sv. 4a; OLD sv. 7.

²³ Cf. Kühner, Holzweissig, Stegmann 1912: 756; Wolanin 2012: 452; Pinkster 2015: 550–551.

²⁴ Cf. Wolanin 2012: 265–267; Pinkster 2015: 1224–1225.

the actions expressed by the participles. Moreover, the vocative construction appears to be situated in the past – not through reference to any specific grammatical tense, but rather through its anchoring in a particular communicative situation. That situation encompasses two temporal dimensions: the period of the *Carmina*’s composition along with its overarching compositional plan – designed “from Maecenas to Maecenas”²⁵ – and the moment of the letter’s dispatch, in which the speaker engages the recipient as if he were directly present, thereby dissolving the temporal dilation characteristic of epistolary exchange.²⁶ This interpretative framework hinges above all on the identification of the logical subject of the participial constructions – *mihi* with the sender, who presents himself as no longer a *vates: spectatum satis et donatum iam rude quaeris*. From the poet’s perspective, the compositional plan has already been completed, framed between the *prima* and the *summa Camena*; it is only Maecenas’s request that renders him once again “unfinished.”

Here, the gerundive does not so much indicate Maecenas’s entitlement to another poem – which, in fact, will never come to be – as it expresses the intended purpose of the logical subject *mihi*, referring to a time when he was still devoted to lyric poetry.²⁷ The obligation in question arises not from Maecenas’s social position, but from the necessity dictated by the internal logic of the poetic design itself. Accordingly, the line may be read as a reminder: ‘Maecenas, just as you were praised in the first poem, so you were meant to be praised in the last one’ – with a subtle yet discernible suggestion that Maecenas, of all people, should have been well aware of this, since – as becomes clear in *Epist.* 1.19 – he is treated as the reader *par excellence*, both individually

²⁵ Cf. Nisbet, Hubbard 1970: 1; Nisbet, Rudd 2007: 345. One might say that Horace humorously casts Maecenas in the role that Propertius assigned to Cynthia, the elegiac lover and muse: *mi neque amare aliam neque ab hac desistere fas est: / Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit* (Prop. 1.12.19–20).

²⁶ Cf. Devine, Stephens 2013: 47–48.

²⁷ Cf. Kühner, Holzweissig, Stegmann 1912: 731–732; Wolanin 2012: 452, 457; Pinkster 2021: 797–798.

and metonymically,²⁸ and is thus expected by the poet to approach the text with heightened attentiveness and interpretive awareness.

Another component of the communicative situation is the parallel between *summa Camena* and *antiquo ludo*. Notably, the image of the gladiatorial school – frequently invoked in scholarship – had not yet fully developed, which renders the connection between the Camena – as both Muse and song – and the ludus, understood in Horace’s poetics as a technical term for his polymetric verse (*iambi* and *carmina* alike²⁹), particularly clear.

The adjective *summus* gains its full semantic weight when read in conjunction with *antiquus* (“that which existed earlier, former, old”³⁰), suggesting a completed and exhausted phase of poetic practice. The communicative force of the passage stems less from its grammatical structure than from the semantic density of its vocabulary.³¹ Maecenas, unaware of – or unwilling to accept – the poet’s decision, requests a panegyric work. Yet in a characteristically Horatian dedicatory recusatio, the speaker reminds him that he has already been celebrated – in the programmatic opening ode of the lyric collection – and that his glory was to be praised for eternity in its concluding poem. The future passive participle *dicende*, functioning as an attributive modifier, expresses the goal or intended direction of the action – here, as a continuation of the poet’s design, it is encompassed by the final *car-men* (*summa dicende Camena*), just as Maecenas is encompassed by the *Carmina* – yet it remains embedded in a communicative situation framed in the past. Horace reminds his patron not only that his poetic debt has already been repaid, and that everything to follow will, in turn, be a debt owed to the poet himself, but also – more significantly from a poetic perspective – that through the figure of Maecenas, the addressee of *Carm.* 1.1 and 3.29, the opening verse of *Epist.* 1.1 evokes the entirety of the *Carmina* collection. It does so not as an abstract

²⁸ The list of Horatian implied and real readers is, in fact, short (cf. *Sat.* 1.10.81–90). The elitism of Horace’s Muse was a task not only for the author, but also for the reader – a conscious and erudite recipient of literature; cf. Pavlovskis 1968: 22–41.

²⁹ Roman 2014: 226.

³⁰ OLD sv. 3a.

³¹ Devine, Stephens 2013: 51–55 (Time in nominals).

notion of poetry, but as a completed and ontically distinct whole, existing independently of its author.

A particularly meaningful context is introduced by the expression *summa Camena*, which – interpreted as “final song,” both in the sense of the last poem in the collection and the poet’s “last song” in a broader poetic sense – already introduces, at the very outset, the motif of the swan song.³² Consequently, an intertextual link is established with the epilogues to Books II and III of the *Carmina* – *Odes* 2.20 and 3.30 – both of which incorporate the themes of burial and metamorphosis into a swan, presented as a journey toward immortality. In this allusion, Horace transfers the funerary context realized in Ode 3.30 from the epilogue of lyric poetry to the programmatic opening of the *Epistles*, marking the threshold of a generic transformation – from *carmina* to *epistulae*. Contained within the motif of the swan song – and the subsequent theme of praising or singing Maecenas into an infinite future – is the true *recusatio*: an implicit indication that the patron has already received from the poet the gift of immortality through his “swan song,” that is, his highest lyrical accomplishment. The passage, in this sense, recalls *Ode* 1.6, where the poetic speaker declines to compose a panegyric for Agrippa, citing his own inadequacy in handling epic material – emphasizing that an unsuccessful work would discredit not only the poet but also its intended addressee (*Carm.* 1.6.5–12). The lone gladiator standing in the arena (*Epist.* 1.1.4–6) becomes, in this reading, not only a synonym for the dependent client but also a metapoetic figure. For the poet, having achieved all that can be achieved within the sphere of lyric, and having constructed a corpus framed by the figure of Maecenas – not merely a patron but also the most important reader and critic – highlights the fact that a return to lyric entails the risk of being defeated not just by younger rivals, but by himself. For the poet crowned with the Delphic laurel will now compete against his own past accomplishments – a task all the more difficult given that *non eadem est aetas, non mens* (*Epist.* 1.1.4).

At the same time, the funerary context, in addition to emphasizing the gift of immortality granted by an immortal poet to his patron, also implies that the *vates* is dead. This is not to be understood as the literal

³² Cf. Pl. *Phd.* 84e–85b.

death of the author, but rather as a poetic gesture: Horace has symbolically laid to rest his lyric persona. The image of the gladiator resonates with the customs of funeral games,³³ reinforcing that reading. The context of the *ludi funebres* not only signals that the *Epistles* grow directly out of the *Carmina*'s epilogue, but also inverts the perspective of *Ode* 3.30 – transforming the speaker from the central figure in a triumphal procession toward immortality into, somewhat ironically, the sacrificial victim in games held in his own honor. Consequently, the generic boundary between lyric and “hexametric essays”³⁴ begins to function as a mirror – one in which the self-conscious author may look himself in the eye and examine his past achievements with a measure of detachment. From that vantage point, Horace is able to transpose, through subtle allusion, the two epilogues from the *Carmina* into the opening of the *Epistles* – both of which conclude with symbolic acts of burial. The farewell becomes more literal, entailing a departure from the very formula of song as the primary mode of poetic expression. What is at stake, then, is not merely a shift in genre, but a transformation in the optics of poetic creation: writing now comes to the fore, and with it emerges a deeper division between the poet and both his poetry and his poetic work.

Especially telling is the way in which the power of the *carmen*³⁵ is displaced onto the *liber* or *libellus*, revealing the full extent of the transference. Offering a solution to the problem of moral suffering, Horace writes later in the first epistle:

sunt verba et voces quibus hunc lenire dolorem
 possis et magnam morbi deponere partem.
 Laudis amore tumes: sunt certa piacula quae te
 ter pure lecto poterunt recreare libello.
 (*Epist.* 1.1.34–37)

³³ Bernstein 2007: 222–234.

³⁴ This is how Kenneth Quinn describes the *Sermones* and *Epistulae*, Quinn 1979: 194–198.

³⁵ There is no need to reiterate the magical dimension of the lexeme *carmen*, cf. OLD sv. 1.

Verba undoubtedly alludes to magical incantations; *voces* evokes the healing power of sound and music. Their ethical analogue in the face of character flaws is found in *piacula* – ritual acts of purification – gathered in the *libellus*, the “little book” that symbolizes the power of the *Epistles* themselves. The book thus assumes the curative role previously attributed to poetic song. The symbolic function of the *libellus* is deeply embedded in the overarching purpose Horace assigns to his new work, as formulated earlier:

sic mihi tarda fluunt ingrataque tempora quae spem
consiliumque morantur agendi nauiter id quod
aeque pauperibus prodest, lucupletibus aequae,
aeque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit.
(*Epist.* 1.1.23–26)

He establishes a practical and universal ethical objective for his *Epistles*: to act vigorously on what benefits both the poor and the wealthy, and whose neglect harms the young and the old alike. The *libellus*, then, becomes not merely a substitute for the performative *carmen*, but a vessel of therapeutic discourse – written, ritually purifying, and ethically prescriptive.

In analyses of the *Epistles*, the primary focus is often placed on their content – whether biographical or philosophical – but in Horace’s case, equal attention should be paid to what might be called the figurative dimension of poetic gestures. Among them is notably the transition from *verba* to *libellus*, as it reflects a similar “poetic gesture” with which the Venusian had begun his career. This was the act of appropriating magical power from the witches who tormented the speaker in the *Iambi* – a speaker who alone resisted the force of their spells by exercising poetic mastery over song. Nevertheless, the figures in *Epod.* 17 compete specifically for power over the *libri carminum*:

Iam iam efficaci do manus scientiae,
supplex et oro regna per Proserpinae,
per et Dianae non movenda numina,
per atque libros carminum valentium

refixa caelo devocare sidera,
 Canidia: parce vocibus tandem sacris
 citumque retro solve, solve turbinem.
 (*Epod.* 17.1–7)

While Horace did not disregard the act of writing (cf. *Epod.* 11), the perspective on ritual underwent a significant shift. In the *Iambi* and *Carmina*, the book functioned as a vessel of memory: the *carmina* were enclosed within the volume, but their power was released through spoken utterance – belonging to the domain of *scientia*, whose agent was Canidia. The magic of the carmen, in other words, worked through her. In the present case, the perspective is now directed toward the book itself and the reader’s encounter with it.

This is all the more important given that the ritual of reading the *libellus* three times (*ter lecto libello*) functions not only as a magical formula but also as a literary-critical one:

saepe stilum vertas, iterum quae digna legi sint
 scripturus, neque te ut miretur turba labores,
 contentus paucis lectoribus. an tua demens
 vilibus in ludis dictari carmina malis?
 [...]
 i, puer, atque meo citus haec subscribe libello
 (*Sat.* 1.10.72–75, 92)

Iterum digna legi – to write what is worth reading again – is the principle that guides Horace’s perfectionism. At the same time, it is a demand grounded in Hellenistic poetics and the ideal of erudition – on the part of the author, the text, and the reader alike. Ancient audiences may have been more attuned to the subtleties of Horace’s art, but even they would likely have appreciated the opportunity to read a text slowly and attentively, in solitude. Today, reading – especially of Horace – is typically an intertextual experience, supported by commentary and scholarly analysis. Considering the development of Alexandrian philology, Augustan poets likely read their predecessors in much the

same way.³⁶ The availability of the text – the possibility of rereading – becomes a central aspect of the lifelong *enarratio poetarum* / *auctorum*, undertaken by both author and reader. The process, comparable to the modern hermeneutic circle, begins with an initial selection of material: the work should abound in moral *exempla* while also exhibiting linguistic, stylistic, and literary qualities that form the foundation for *imitatio*. Such a procedure is, on one hand, fundamental to the teaching of literature and rhetoric, but on the other, becomes an enduring feature of the writer's life. As Quintilian wrote: *perlectus liber utique ex integro resumendus* (*Inst.* 10.1.20).³⁷

In the passages cited, Horace addresses both issues: on one hand, he expresses concern about the inclusion of his texts – and himself – within the *ludus*, the elementary school, where repetition risks becoming mechanical and the work is vulgarized through overexposure (cf. *Sat.* 1.10.75; *Epist.* 1.1.3ff; 1.20.17–18). On the other hand, he clearly strives to create a work that is both universal and profound – worthy of being read again.

A parallel to the fate of the “schoolbook” text – whose depth may be lost amid linguistic and literary drills – and simultaneously a notable testimony to allegorical reading of Homer, is found in *Epist.* 1.2. Already the opening lines offer rich material for interpretation:

Troiani belli scriptorem, Maxime Lolli,
dum tu declamas Romae, Praeneste relegi;
qui, quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.
Cur ita crediderim, nisi quid te distinet, audi.
(*Epist.* 1.2.1–5)

As previously noted, rereading familiar works is central to the ethos of the rhetor, forming an essential part not only of his professional formation but also of his lasting engagement with literature. Formally, however, the practice is associated not with the school of the rhetor,

³⁶ Cf. Lyne 2005: 542–558.

³⁷ Lausberg 1998: § 16–30. H. Lausberg, following ancient sources, situates *enarratio* as a school practice within the domain of grammar.

but with that of the grammarian – that is, with elementary education. Within this framework, the speaker’s declaration of rereading Homer takes on special significance. It is directly contrasted with the activity of the addressee, who is engaged in rhetorical exercises (*declamare*). *Declamatio* pertains to the practice of delivery (*pronuntiatio*) – the fifth part of rhetorical art according to Lausberg.³⁸ Importantly, this does not refer to vocal training in a mechanical sense, but rather to the art of oratorical performance: beginning with written notes, but culminating in improvisation on a given topic or word suggested by the audience (*ex tempore dicendi facultas*, Quint. 10.7.1), a mark of the rhetor’s highest skill. Attaining such virtuosity required many years of training. The activities of the addressee, Lollius Maximus, can therefore be situated within the domain of advanced rhetorical education. By contrast, Horace, positioning his speaker one level lower – within the elementary *enarratio poetarum* of the grammarian’s school – symbolically returns to the *ludus*. Such a gesture takes place on the poet’s own terms: this is not the gladiatorial school designed to entertain the masses, but the elementary school, a place of beginnings – of returning to fundamental questions; a renewed voyage aboard the ships of the Achaeans, and a journey in the company of Odysseus, who, in every land he visited, was but a “guest”:

Rursus, quid virtus et quid sapientia possit,
 utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen,
 qui domitor Troiae multorum providus urbes
 et mores hominum inspexit, latumque per aequor,
 dum sibi, dum sociis reditum parat, aspera multa
 pertulit, adversis rerum immersabilis undis.
 Sirenum voces et Circae pocula nosti;
 quae si cum sociis stultus cupidusque bibisset,
 sub domina meretrice fuisset turpis et excors,
 vixisset canis immundus vel amica luto sus.
 (*Epist.* 1.2.17–26)

³⁸ Lausberg 1998: § 1146 (1145–1150).

Naturally, one must not be deceived by the poet in the guise of crafty Odysseus: the entire letter is composed as a kind of *declamatio* on the superiority of poetry over philosophy in shaping fundamental moral concepts – especially in view of the fact that young people encounter poetry long before they are equipped to engage with philosophy. The letter also subtly provides *exempla* – arguments – for the aspiring student of rhetoric, thereby becoming a school text on both levels: as an exercise and as material for instruction, much like the example speeches in the *Phaedrus*. What proves more significant within the poetics of the *Epistles* is the analogy between the construction of the speaker's persona and the figure of Odysseus – particularly his resolute stance in the face of adversity, and, more importantly, the motif of the journey as an allegory of philosophical inquiry. This journey is not only a matter of accumulating experience and knowledge, but also of coming to know oneself. The resemblance to a passage from the first *Epistle* is especially striking:

Ac ne forte roges quo me duce, quo Lare tuter;
 nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri,
 quo me cumque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes.
 Nunc agilis fio et mersor civilibus undis,
 virtutis verae custos rigidusque satelles;
 nunc in Aristippi furtim praecepta relabor
 et mihi res, non me rebus subiungere conor.
 (*Epist.* 1.1.13–18)

Perhaps most tellingly, Odysseus – *fandi fictor*, as Virgil calls him (*Aen.* 9.602) – embodies the persuasive power of speech as the discoverer of rhetoric.³⁹ This very capacity, transmitted through Homer, becomes the property of the reader and, through the sender of the letter, continues its journey toward the recipient. Like Odysseus, the speaker of the *Epistles* does not allow himself to be seduced by the magic of words – precisely because he has mastered them: he remains independent of philosophical schools, just as the hero resists the enchanting songs of the Sirens and the spells of Circe (cf. *Epod.* 17) – a feat

³⁹ Karp 1977: 237–258; de Almeida Semêdo 2020: 13–34.

also recommended to Lollius Maximus. At the same time, he embraces successive challenges, driven by the irresistible imperative of the journey – demonstrating the vitality of his intellect through an ongoing odyssey across philosophical doctrines, literary texts, and ultimately into the lives and pursuits of his addressees, whom he questions by letter about their travels, their current writing projects, or encourages to reply (*Epist.* 1.3, 1.4, 1.15).

It is worth noting that this image had already appeared earlier in Horace's work – not only in the familiar metaphor of the sea as danger and sea voyage as a confrontation with perils (*Carm.* 3.29.57–64), but also with an added intellectual dimension:

Parcus deorum cultor et infrequens,
 insanientis dum sapientiae
 consultus erro, nunc retrorsum
 vela dare atque iterare cursus
 cogor relictos: namque Diespiter
 igni corusco nubila dividens
 plerumque, per purum tonantis
 egit equos volucremque currum
 (*Carm.* 1.34.1–8)

Insanientis sapientia, often interpreted as a reference to Epicureanism and its conception of the gods as non-intervening in human affairs, is here juxtaposed with Stoicism, whose central tenets include divine providence and the direct involvement of the gods in human activity.⁴⁰ Such a reading does not exhaust the interpretive possibilities, but it highlights the function of the sea voyage as a poetic figure – one that may signify either directionless wandering (*errare*) or a purposeful journey. This notion is particularly important, as the motif of travel in Horace's poetry is inherently ambivalent – representing both movement toward something and flight from something. From the theme of escape from Rome to the Isles of the Blessed in *Epod.* 16, in response to the nightmare of civil war and proscriptions; through the escapism of withdrawal to the Sabine estate (both from and toward, as in

⁴⁰ Nisbet, Hubbard 1970: 376–379.

Carm. 1.17), a theme permeating Horace's oeuvre; to the image of endless pursuit of wealth or happiness, which can in the end be found only within oneself (*Epist.* 1.11.27: *caelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt*; cf. *Carm.* 1.1.15–18) – each of these journeys is framed by a different motivation and worldview. For the present discussion, however, what matters most is the function of the journey motif in articulating the principles of Horace's poetics.

In this context, considering that alongside the speaker the other “protagonists” of the textual events are the *Carmina* collection and the gradually emerging book of *Epistles* – which will gain full autonomy in the epilogue – it is necessary to pay close attention to the aspect of separation between the speaker and the book. If the *Epistles* represent the record of the speaker's intellectual journey, then their immediate background lies in the poetic journey of the *vates* as developed in the *Odes* – a journey that intertwines the themes of immortality and the expansion of the poet's fame alongside the Romanization of the world: a motif that unites the epilogues to Books II and III:

Iam Daedaleo ocior Icaro
uisam gementis litora Bosphori
 Syrtsique Gaetulas canorus
 ales Hyperboreosque campos.
Me Colchus et qui dissimulat metum
Marsae cohortis Dacus et ultimi
 noscent Geloni, me peritus
 discet Hiber Rhodanique potor.
(*Carm.* 2.20.13–20)

and:

Non omnis moriar multaque pars mei
vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera
crescam laude recens, dum Capitolium
scandet cum tacita virgine pontifex.
Dicar, qua violens obstrepit Aufidus
et qua pauper aquae Daunus agrestium

regnavit populorum, ex humili potens
 princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos
 deduxisse modos.
 (*Carm.* 3.30.6–14)

It reappears in a new light in *Epist.* 1.20, where the paths of the poet and the book completely diverge: the speaker wishes to remain in the peace of the countryside, while the *liber* seeks to “sell itself” in the busiest parts of Rome. Unable to keep the book locked away in his chest, the speaker nevertheless offers it a warning in prophetic form: once purchased in Rome, the intellectual center of the Empire, it will gradually make its way to ever smaller provincial towns, until eventually it lands in the hands of a teacher (*grammaticus*) in a rural school, where it will serve as a primer (vv. 9–18).⁴¹ *Horror scholae*, however, is not entirely justified, since – as the poet announced in the first and second letters of the collection – it is also meant to serve as a first textbook of ethics, and, in old age, the book will go on to recount the story of the Roman bard who created it. Indeed, in *Epist.* 1.20 the *liber* is animated: the scroll is granted its own will, a desire to be widely circulated, a need to engage with readers, and even the capacity for speech:

Cum tibi sol tepidus pluris admoverit auris,
 me libertino natum patre et in tenui re
 maiores pinnae nido extendisse loqueris,
 ut quantum generi demas, virtutibus addas;
 me primis urbis belli placuisse domique,
 corporis exigui, praecanum, solibus aptum,
 irasci celerem, tamen ut placabilis essem.
 Forte meum si quis te percontabitur aevum,
 me quater undenos sciat impleuisse Decembris
 collegam Lepidum quo duxit Lollius anno.
 (*Epist.* 1.20.19–28)

Among the various terms referring to the capacity for speech – and by extension, to being heard – such as *auris admovere*, *loqui*, *addere*,

⁴¹ Cf. Oliensis 1995: 209–224.

and *percontari* – special attention should be given to *loqui*, as it situates the book of letters within Horace’s distinctive domain of “living speech.” A particularly significant instance of this poetics is the spring of Bandusia, a place where the natural world itself seems to whisper to the poet:

Fies nobilium tu quoque fontium
me dicente cavis impositam ilicem
saxis, unde loquaces
lympae desiliunt tuae.
(*Carm.* 3.13.13–16)

Loqui, and the adjective *loquax* (as in *loquaces lympae*), belong to the same poetic register as Lalage, a speaking name (sic!) derived from the Greek verb *lalagein* – “to prattle, to chatter.”⁴² In *Carm.* 1.22, Lalage is the embodiment of sweetness in both laughter and speech:

Pone me pigris ubi nulla campis
arbor aestiva recreatur aura,
quod latus mundi nebulae malusque
Iuppiter urget;
pone sub curru nimium propinqui
solis in terra domibus negata:
dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
dulce loquentem.
(*Carm.* 1.22.17–24)

The domain in question is the realm of the poet’s magical song – a space shaped by the creative power of his voice, which unites the moral dimension of his work – since such song can come only from the lips of a man pure of life and free of guilt (cf. *Carm.* 1.22.1: *Integer vitae scelerisque purus*) – with its aesthetic aspect, forming Horace’s distinctive aesth-ethics, the *unitas* of his oeuvre.⁴³ Whereas in the Odes this power belonged exclusively to the singing vates, in the *Epistles*

⁴² Nisbet, Hubbard 1970: 268.

⁴³ Cody 1976: 45–71.

it is effectively transferred to the scroll containing the texts – thereby altering the ontic status of the scroll itself. No longer merely a mnemonic device or a repository of written content, it becomes a work of art in its own right: a higher-order organization of the poet's words that transcends the level of individual poems. The Augustan poetic book introduces a new aesthetic dimension – namely, the authorial arrangement of themes, motifs, and figures through which individual texts interact, generating new interpretive frameworks or reinforcing meanings already latent within the texts themselves.⁴⁴

Even so, it is worth noting that in the *Epistles*, the poet and the book travel separately. The poet himself is shown as largely stationary – his thoughts and intellect travel through the letters he sends, or through the protagonists of his favorite readings. He spends his time in Sabinum, returning to Rome only when necessary. Even in *Epist.* 1.15, when he looks for a new retreat in southern Italy, he travels only figuratively, through questions directed to a friend from those regions (vv. 1–25). When he writes *mutandus locus est* (v. 10), he expresses merely an intention – no more tangible than the poet's dream of escaping to the Isles of the Blessed. Such is the essence of the inner journey: unity with oneself and the world (*Epist.* 1.11).

The journey of the scrolls containing the first three books of the *Carmina* in *Epist.* 1.13 is of a different kind. Positioned somewhere between the poet-prophet's ascent toward immortality and global fame, and the more mundane travels of the scroll through the hands of readers – beginning in the capital and ending in the remotest provincial schools, where it is gradually worn out – the sealed *volumina* are now sent as a personal delivery to Augustus. Leaving aside the irony of sending a letter-like parcel to the princeps after the poet's well-known refusal to serve as his *ab epistulis*,⁴⁵ one must note the constellation of

⁴⁴ Cf. Santirocco 1986: 14–41.

⁴⁵ Freudenburg 2002: 33–55. Kirk Freudenburg has drawn attention to a crucial issue regarding Horace's choice of the literary form of the letter. The scholar recalls the events of 23 BCE, when the princeps, suffering from illness, offered Horace the position of *ab epistulis*, a secretary responsible for managing the emperor's correspondence. Horace declined the offer, invoking his own poor health; nevertheless, he soon published the first book of the *Epistles*. In Freudenburg's view, "this is an irony that inheres every letter he writes in that book" (Freudenburg 2002: 36). Perspective is essen-

elements in this lyric situation: the speaker/sender of the letter – the recipient/messenger (Vinnius Asina) – the *volumina signata* – and Augustus as the recipient. Above all, the messenger has a long and arduous road ahead, one he must endure like a beast of burden:

Si te forte meae grauis uret sarcina chartae,
ab icito potius quam quo perferre iuberis
clitellas ferus inpingas Asinaeque paternum
cognomen uertas in risum et fabula fias.
Viribus uteris per cliuos, flumina, lamas.
(*Epist.* 1.13.6–10)

The entrusted scrolls (*mandata*, v. 19) slip from the author's hands, regardless of his efforts to secure their success. Detachment is further emphasized in *Epist.* 1.19, where – in anticipation of transferring the poet's power to the *liber* in the final epistle – Horace links the artistic dimension of his *carmina* to their physical medium (vv. 21–34), which allows them to reach even the humblest homes. Yet even then, the separation between author and work is clearly marked, as the speaker's opuscula exist both in the domestic space (*domi*) and in the public sphere (*extra limen*) solely through the act of reading: *Scire uelis, mea cur ingratus opuscula lector / laudet ametque domi, premat extra limen iniquus* (*Epist.* 1.19.34–35).

Horace thereby enacts the resolution expressed in *Carm.* 3.29, where – having renounced even “song” – he returns to virtue (vv. 53–64). Although he is prepared to part with his works, he makes clear that nothing will truly separate him from them: just as part of the poet has survived the funeral rites (and that twice, in the epilogues to Books II and III), so too does a part of him endure in every scroll, no matter how distant or worn. Nevertheless, the gesture of distancing himself from his own oeuvre and from the practice of art – echoing his earlier

tial to understanding the socio-political implications of Horace's gesture in abandoning lyric poetry – particularly laudatory lyric in the Pindaric mode, composed in praise of the most prominent figures of the state – and of his refusal of Augustus himself, followed by the publication of the *Epistles*. As Freudenburg observes: “his every letter to a friend in *Epistles* book 1 counts as a letter not written for Augustus (whether to him, as *familiaris*, or on his behalf, as his *ab epistulis*)” (Freudenburg 2002: 36-37).

withdrawal from the community (*Carm.* 1.1, 3.1), and eventually even from his patron and the institution of patronage – constructs the image not only of a free man and poet, but also of an objective critic of art. In doing so, it helps shape the distinctive poetics and aesthetics that define Horace's later work, particularly in the second book of *Epistles*, marked by his fluid movement between the persona of the *poeta doctus* and that of the non-creator – one who nonetheless manages to transpose his experience from one genre into another (cf. *Ars P.* 86–91, 304–308).

The motif of song, understood as the essence of poetry and generally associated with the notion of madness, inspiration, and divine possession, intertwines in the *Epistles* with the motif of writing, which is linked to the separation between the final, crafted outcome of inspiration and the poet himself. These two threads constitute parts of Horace's own version of the Neoptolemian triad, which he reconfigured by distinguishing *cantare* from *scribere*. *Cantare* encompasses the core of poetry – that divine, ineffable element that allows a mortal to reach beyond human limits and, in some way, to touch the realm of the gods. Yet *mania* – the manifestation of artistic genius – comes at the cost of artistic consciousness and control over one's creative act, a price Horace was never willing to pay. From the very beginning of his career, he demonstrated a concern with the internal mechanisms of poetic composition. Hence, in his reflections on poetics, we find a fundamental stage-structure of artistic creation: following the moment of inspiration (*cantare*) comes *scribere* – the labor of composition, associated with verbs such as *componere* (*Epist.* 1.1.12) and *meditari* (*Carm.* 3.25.5; *Epist.* 2.2.65–86), denoting the conscious effort of shaping the material, including the organization of content on a scale greater than that of individual poems, satires, or letters, extending to the composition of entire books. Ultimately, the dynamic may be understood as a process in which the poet loses and regains control over himself and his art – so that the final product of the collaboration can be acknowledged by the poet as his own, yet distinct from him, and not devoid of that mysterious divine spark.

In the *Epistles*, the paradigm of the “poet's song” familiar from the *Odes* is displaced toward the motif of writing and reading. The poet's song – in the sense of an actual performance and its magical

properties – has become a matter of the past; for the *Epistles* to preserve that power, they must function as a kind of wisdom book, almost in the way Horace once portrayed the enchanted book used by the witch Canidia in the *Epodes* – *libri carminum valentium / refixa caelo devocare sidera*. What emerges in the new hierarchy is a transformed paradigm: whereas in the *Odes*, the primacy of singing *hic et nunc* was inseparable from the poetic subject, and writing was secondary to the experience of divine presence and of the poem as an echo of the Muse's ideal song – bestowed upon her chosen poet – in the *Epistles*, writing becomes primary. Horace underscores the shift most clearly through contrast: in the opening epistle, the repetition of *dicere* in the first line stands opposed to the verbs *condere* and *componere* in line 12, precisely in the passage where the subject renounces lyric poetry in favor of philosophical inquiry into fundamental Socratic questions.

Such an opposition no longer mirrors the earlier relationship between *dicere/cantare* and *scribere* in the *Odes*, but signifies something more substantial. The previous juxtaposition could be interpreted, on the one hand, as a search for the essence of the creative process and, on the other, as a kind of playful irony toward the reader – who, after all, engages with a scroll rather than a live performance (even though Horace bases this experience on a “restored” model of archaic Greek lyric, sung to the accompaniment of an instrument⁴⁶). By contrast, the later opposition expands the concept of writing beyond a mere act of inscription (cf. *Sat.* 1.10.92, the recording of something dictated), transforming it into a deliberate gathering of material from various written and oral sources, and its conscious organization into a coherent structure. In keeping with the principle of *hic et nunc*, the literary work takes the form of an intentional arrangement of selected content – documenting the subject's intellectual journey, his personal “odyssey.” This is no longer a process of merely transcribing a preexisting idea already present in the author; it becomes an act of creation in real time, through compilation and inscription. Writing and composing become one, just as in the *Odes*, singing and composing were one.

On that point, the *Epistles* differ even from the *Satires*, which – although likewise presented as the product of painstaking labor with the

⁴⁶ Atkins 1934: 47–55; O’Gorman 2002: 81–101.

stylus (*Sat.* 1.10.72) and carefully crafted to merit re-reading – still preserve the element of living speech, particularly through their dialogic structure and Horace's emphasis on the term *sermones*: speaking to the audience rather than writing for it. Moreover, a second aspect of the poet's relationship to literature becomes more prominent – namely, that of reading. Already embedded in the very structure of letter exchange, reading becomes a manifestation of Horace's critical-literary passion and a crucial step in the formation of the figure of the non-creator in the *Epistle to the Pisos*. Yet before the figure could be fully developed, it seems that Horace first needed to clarify the relationship between the new poetic subject and the figure of the *vates* – the inspired bard – and the related concept of divinely inspired poetry, which by its nature resists full containment within the rules of art.

The entire process of transforming the figure of the poetic subject converges in the image of the letter journeying to its recipient, carrying the sender along with it through a time-space continuum that may be described as “epistolary time” – a temporal mode in which the sender freely transcends grammatical tense, at times immersing himself in his own “present,” at others projecting forward to the moment the letter is received.⁴⁷ The form of the letter allows the poet to transcend natural limitations – spatial, ideological, emotional – by acknowledging the growing distance between friends while still offering a means to sustain their bond without the pressure of conformity.⁴⁸ At the same time, as a poetic figure, it signifies a continuous exchange of texts and an ongoing detachment of the work from its sender-author – making separation the central leitmotif of the collection, eventually defining its „self-consciousness”. One might therefore venture that Neoptolemus's seemingly arbitrary triad of poetic art – *poema* – *poesis* – *poeta* – finds a distinctly Horatian counterpart in the *Epistles*: *cantus* – *liber* – *poeta*, a structure that traces the stages of poetic creation. Within this configuration, the poet becomes the *divinus spiritus* – the divine presence – who animates the scrolls.

In a final turn, the paths of the poet and the scroll – gradually diverging throughout *Epistles* I and definitively separated in *Epist.*

⁴⁷ Devine, Stephens 2013: 47–48.

⁴⁸ Cf. Oliensis 1998: 157–165.

1.20 – are brought together once more *in ludis*, within the very same work. Yet this renewed convergence fundamentally reshapes their dynamic: the animated scroll becomes the storyteller, while the poet himself is transfigured into a legend (cf. *Carm.* 4.6.41–44) – also in the original Latin sense of *legenda*. In doing so, Horace not only replicates but powerfully reaffirms the motif of poetic immortality articulated in the epilogues to the second and third books of the *Carmina*. Here, at the end, the poet undergoes yet another metamorphosis: shifting from gladiator to lanista, from racehorse and athlete to trainer – which anticipates his later transformation into the “whetstone,” a metaphor for the teacher of poetry encompassing both its ethical and aesthetic dimensions in the *Epistle to the Pisos* (*Ars P.* 304–322) – he moves from being a practitioner within the Aristotelian framework of *praxis* and *phronesis* to something closer to a contemplative man (*anthropon theoretikon*), thereby laying the foundations for his own school of poetry. From this, the school emerges as a distinct entity – at once separate from and entirely dependent upon the poet as its founder (*nomothetes*). And since a completed work must necessarily be read from the beginning, the image of the gladiator in the arena acquires an entirely new dimension: the retired warrior does not fade into oblivion but, in seeking a new path, proposes a new kind of *ludus* – a school in which one can learn not only to read and write, but how to read and write poetry.

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