

TOSSING AUGUSTUS OUT OF HORACE'S *ARS POETICA*

In a previous article I have tried to explain why the lines 445-52 of Horace's *Ars Poetica* should be considered as an interpolation ascribable to Augustus¹. But did the imperial forger limit himself to these eight verses? Five passages are concerned (42-45; 212-13; 303-8; 319-22; 461-69), whose candidacy to exclusion will be first examined one by one, before being justified at the global level by the observation of the links which connect them (including 445-52), as well as by some numerical considerations.

Spuriousness of lines 42-45:

Ordinis haec uirtus erit et uenus, aut ego fallor,

Vt iam nunc dicat iam nunc debentia dici,

Pleraque differat et praesens in tempus omittat,

Hoc amet, hoc spernat promissi carminis auctor.

“Charm and excellence in construction, if I’m right,

Is to say here and now, what’s to be said here and now,

Retaining, and omitting, much, for the present.

Moreover as the author of the promised work,

Liking this, rejecting that...”²

Let’s pass over the clumsiness of *haec erit ut*, “will consist in the fact that”, the remoteness of *dicat* from its subject, the uselessness of *tempus*, a mere

¹ <http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/sphengl.pdf>, pp. 5 ff.

² Translation (here and after) by A. S. Kline:

http://tkline.pgcc.net/PITBR/Latin/HoraceArsPoetica.htm#_Toc98156241

padding³, the looseness of *iam nunc... iam nunc*, that should rather mean “sometimes... sometimes”, so that Bentley put the comma after *dicat*, not after *dici*, with this poor result: “sometimes he would say what must be said, sometimes he would defer it for the most part”. But did we really need Horace’s help to know that a writer cannot say at once all he has to say? However, this miserable truism⁴ is thrust at us with a lot of redundancies: *uirtus... et uenus* (instead of *uenustas*: a cheap effect)⁵; *differat – praesens in tempus omittat*, picked up again by *hoc amet, hoc spernat*: all prescriptions which, except their pretension, add nothing to the thought⁶. Finally, there is this bombastic *promissi carminis auctor* (literally: “the guarantor of a promised work”) whose emptiness becomes obvious as soon as one transposes the sentence at the second person. This *promissi* is even so inept that one could almost wonder whether the author doesn’t secretly intend it in the sense of ‘long’ (as about a beard), with a derisive intention possibly confirmed not only by the *pleraque* instead of *multa* (for is it not evident that, except what you have to say now, all the rest you will

³ One would expect *in praesens*, or rather *in futurum*: cf. C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry. The Ars Poetica*, Cambridge, 1971, *ad loc.*: “*praesens in tempus*: the opposite, *in futurum* or the like, may be implied”.

⁴ P. Grimal, *Essai sur l’Art Poétique d’Horace*, Paris, Sedes, 1968, 77: “prétentieuse niaiserie... tautologie... platitude”. However his solution is scarcely satisfying: “il a voulu attirer notre attention... sur la nécessité de la confrontation minutieuse entre l’artiste et l’idée de son poème”.

⁵ An effect sometimes praised however: “they make an effective and untranslatable pair”, judges for example Niall Rudd, *Horace Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones (Ars Poetica)*, Cambridge, 1989, *ad loc.*, arguing that this pair joins a masculine quality to a feminine one (but what is the interest of such a figure about a scheme?).

⁶ Plessis-Lejay, *Horace. Œuvres*, Paris, 1912 (1st ed. 1903), *ad loc.*: “*spernat*: synonyme hyperbolique de *omittat*”. The interpreters’ discomfort found expression in the initiative formerly taken by Bentley (followed *inter alios* by C. O. Brink) in transposing lines 45 and 46.

say later ?), but also and especially by the incidental clause *aut ego fallor*, “if I am not mistaken”, as though one could be mistaken while stating such a truism.

Admittedly, the reader who asks Horace a regular treaty about poetry expects at this place (between *inuentio* and *elocutio*) a development about *dispositio*, and the interpolator would have filled this illusory lacuna by picking up the just preceding *lucidus ordo*, in spite of the fact that, as it happens, Horace was pointing out that he did not want to dwell on *dispositio* (or plan), since it would offer itself spontaneously, in its whole clarity, *lucidus*, to the author who would have adequately chosen its subject:

Cui lecta potenter erit res / Nec facundia deseret hunc, nec lucidus ordo.

Spuriousness of lines 212-13:

Indoctus quid enim saperet liberque laborum

Rusticus urbano confusus, turpis honesto?

“What taste could the illiterate show, freed from toil,
Where country mingled with city, noble with base ?”

These two verses constitute a sort of parenthesis perfectly incongruous, and moreover omitted by a whole manuscript family. Such a fierce onslaught on countrymen (*indoctus, turpis*) is not only shocking, to the point that F. Villeneuve, for instance, shrinks from the real meaning of *turpis*, which is a synonymous of ‘shabby’, ‘wretched’, ‘dead loss’⁷, it is also inconceivable from a poet who always presented himself as a countryman and a nature-lover: see for example *Sat.* 2, 6, *Epist.* 1. 16, or this verse from *Epist.* 1. 14. 10 : *Rure ego*

⁷ F. Villeneuve, *Les Epîtres d’Horace*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1934. Similarly, Plessis-Lejay, *ad loc.*: “*turpis honesto* : expriment des catégories sociales, non la moralité”.

uiuentem, tu dicis in urbe beatum (“I call the country-dweller, you the townsman, blessed”), and this famous salutation to Fuscus in *Epist.* 1. 10. 1-2: *Vrbis amatorem Fuscum saluere iubemus / Ruris amatores* (“To Fuscus the city-lover I the country-lover / Send greetings”).

In addition, this parenthesis is inconsistent with its context. Horace indeed, going back to the origins of theatre at Rome, has spoken in praise of its ancient spectators, which he depicts as “honest, innocent, modest” (*frugi, castus uerecundusque*, 207) until the Urbs enormously expanded, so that public morality began to lessen, with the result that “tempo and melody possessed greater licence”⁸ on the scene : *accessit numerisque modisque licentia maior*. Here take place the two verses in question, which are deeper than it may seem at first view, for, under the cover of blaming that *licentia maior*, they extol it on the contrary, terming *rusticus* the ancient Roman public so praised by Horace. Admittedly, those spectators were *agricolae* (cf. *Epist.* II, 1, 139-144 : *Agricolae prisci, fortes paruoque beati*, “the farmers of old, those tough men blessed with little”, a clear echo to our v. 207), but *rusticus* is an insult, as if, for the interpolator, *agricola* meant ‘ignorant and shabby’⁹.

Spuriousness of lines 303-8:

Non alius faceret meliora poemata; uerum

Nil tanti est. Ergo fungar uice cotis, acutum

Reddere quae ferrum ualet exsors ipsa secandi;

⁸ Kline wrongly translates *licentia* by ‘freedom’.

⁹ The qualifier *rusticus* is a typical insult on the lips of the townsman: cf. Virg., *Ecl.* II, 56; III, 84. Even P. Grimal has fallen into the trap, when he speaks of those “*rustici* qui encombrement le théâtre aux jours de fête” (p. 198).

Munus et officium, nil scribens ipse, docebo,

Vnde parentur opes, quid alat formatque poetam,

Quid deceat, quid non, quo uirtus, quo ferat error.

“Though no one would compose¹⁰ better poetry : it’s really
Not worth it. Instead let me play the grindstone’s role,
That sharpens steel, but itself does none of the cutting :
Writing nothing myself, I’ll teach the office and function,
Where to find resources, what feeds and forms the poet,
What’s right, what’s not, where virtue and error lead.”

At first sight, the thought is coherent, and could even pass for witty: Horace declares that, if he indulged in madness (if he did not take purges for madness each spring, as he puts it, v. 302), his poetry would outdo all his rivals’; but poetry is not worth this price, and therefore he will be satisfied with giving advices to others. So far so good¹¹. On reflection however, several questions are to be asked.

First of all, does the author speak seriously, or is he merely joking¹²? Nobody doubts, as it appears, that only the first sentence (“no one would compose better poems, but it’s not worth it”) is ironical, even though such a

¹⁰ *Faceret* : ‘would compose’, not ‘composes’ (*pace* Kline).

¹¹ Admittedly, the grindstone image is amusing enough, but it is a borrowing from Isocrates : Plut., *Life of the Ten Orators*.

¹² If Horace has renounced to poetry for reason’s sake, as he declares, how can he advise those who have made the opposite choice that “wisdom (*sapere*) is the source and fount of excellent writing” (v. 309)? C. O. Brink duly notes the illogicality of *ergo*, 304 (“crazy logic”), but does not reprove.

position is untenable. Indeed, since Horace has always been a poet, and will remain a poet until his death¹³, the irony should not affect *poemata*, but only *meliora*. In other words, it cannot be a question of renouncement of poetry, but only of a refusal to sacrifice reason for it. How is it possible then that this same Horace presents himself as “writing nothing” (*nil scribens ipse*)? A statement so surprising that commentators try to minimize it, either by claiming, despite the immediate context, that it concerns only theatre¹⁴, or by arbitrarily asserting that *nil* means “nothing worth it”¹⁵. Isn’t it more natural, and more conform to the text, to suppose that the man who is speaking here IS NOT actually a poet, or that, if he writes verses, he prefers to conceal it¹⁶? No irony at all, thus, in these lines, only sarcasm and dissembling. Somebody would have stolen Horace’s pen in order to lecture him and his peers : hence the professorial tone of ll. 306-8, puffed up with arrogance (*munus et officium docebo*), and badly indefinite: *uirtus* strangely opposed to *error*, in what sense¹⁷? and is the final enumeration announcing the *diuisio* of the *Ars*’s last part¹⁸?

¹³ On the date of publication of the fourth book of *Odes*, cf. <http://www.espace-horace.org/etud/maleuvre1.htm>. And even though this last collection would have been published as soon -12 or -13, as often believed, that would not mean that Horace had ceased to be a poet during the four last years of his life.

¹⁴ So Plessis-Lejay, *ad loc.*

¹⁵ “rien qui vaille”, P. Grimal, 215.

¹⁶ That’s typically the case of Augustus, who ascribes to others his own production. As for Horace, he may well pretend, as in *Epist.* 1. 1. 10, to have renounced poetry, it’s not serious (*uersus... pono* = apparently “I stop writing verse”, but in reality “I am here serving new verse”), and he willingly admits it in 2. 1. 112-13 (= “I am lying when I say that”). About *Epist.* II, 2, 141-44, cf. *infra* n. 31.

¹⁷ “le jugement droit”, according to F. Villeneuve; “le talent éclairé par la raison”, Plessis-Lejay.

¹⁸ So P. Grimal 215-18. He acknowledges that “dès que l’on essaie de suivre, dans le développement, l’application de ce plan, on ne tarde pas à rencontrer mille difficultés”, but he

Spuriousness of lines 319-22:

Interdum speciosa locis morataque recte

Fabula nullius ueneris, sine pondere et arte,

Valdius oblectat populum meliusque moratur

Quam uersus inopes rerum nugaeque canorae.

“Often a play with fine bits, good roles,
Though without beauty, substance or art, amuses
The public more, and holds their attention better,
Than verses without content, melodious nonsense.”

Horace has just been urging poets to paint from life, by observing characters and customs, so that *morata*, 319, picking up *morum*, 317, seems at first to continue the thought, but it rapidly turns out that this verbal bridge is only a pretext for launching a vehement attack against conceptions firmly defended elsewhere by our poet. If indeed *speciosa locis* means “fine bits”¹⁹, their recommendation glaringly contradicts the lines 15-16, where they are

imputes to commentators “la confusion que l’on pourrait, à bon droit, reprocher à Horace” (216).

¹⁹ “des morceaux brillants, qui valent par eux-mêmes et sont souvent des hors-d’œuvre”: Plessis-Lejay, *ad loc.*, quoting Quint. 7. 1. 41: *Plerique contenti sunt locis speciosis modo...* Of course, interpreters try to elude this sense: “quand brillent les idées générales”, F. Villeneuve ; C. O. Brink remains in doubt; Niall Rudd proposes : “attractive in virtue of his moral observations”.

condemned as ‘purple patches’ (*purpureus... pannus*)²⁰. Moreover, when he praises the ancient Roman playwrights, as he apparently does here²¹, the author of this passage is purely forgetting what Horace told Augustus in *Epist.* 2. 1 (63-89, 156-176), wondering that his contemporaries admire that defective theatre of old as though it were nearly perfect. On the contrary, our verse 320 hammers out with a sort of rancour the idea that a play can very well charm an audience (*ualdius oblectat*) in spite of its defects, its imperfections, its mediocrity. No news for Horace, of course, but the problem is that the present speaker openly rejoices at these undeserved successes whereas he disparages the most demanding and most authentic poetry, even daring to call it “melodious nonsense”.

It does not come as a surprise that the expression in these four verses is at the same level as the thought itself : obscurity of *speciosa locis* ; unpleasant (quasi)repetition *morata - moratur*, in two very different meanings; inconsistency of *sine pondere* (from *Epist.* 2. 2. 112), synonymous of *inopes rerum*, although the two are set in opposition.

Spuriousness of lines 461-69:

Si curet quis opem ferre et demittere funem,

²⁰ Cf. also *Epist.* 2. 1. 73-75: *Inter quae uerbum emicuit si forte decorum, / Si uersus paulo concinnior unus et alter, / Iniuste totum ducit uenditque poema*, “Though maybe a lovely phrase glitters now and then [in Livius Andronicus], / Or a couple of lines are a little more polished, / That unjustly carry, and sell, the whole poem.”

²¹ Plessis-Lejay, *ad loc.*: “Horace semble penser aux pièces du vieux théâtre latin, auxquelles il refuse l’élégance, la solidité... et l’habileté technique”. But theatre seems out of context here, so that the word *fabula* could well mean ‘tale’ (“may be ‘tale’ ”, C. O. Brink), here as (probably) at v. 339.

*“Qui scis an prudens huc se deiecerit atque
Seruari nolit?” dicam, Siculique poetae
Narrabo interitum. Deus immortalis haberi
Dum cupit Empedocles, ardentem frigidus Aetnam
Insiluit. Sit ius liceatque perire poetis;
Inuitum qui seruat, idem facit occidenti.
Nec semel hoc fecit, nec, si retractus erit, iam
Fiet homo et ponet famosae mortis amorem.*

“If anyone did choose to help, and let down a rope,
I’d say: ‘Who knows if he didn’t do that on purpose,
And doesn’t want to be saved?’ and I’ll tell the tale
Of the Sicilian poet’s death, how Empedocles
Keen to be an immortal god, coolly leapt into
Burning Etna. Grant poets the power and right to kill
Themselves: who saves one, against his will, murders him.
It’s not his first time, nor, if he’s rescued will he
Become human now, and stop craving fame in death.”

This base and hateful attack against Empedocles, emphasized by the unbearable antithesis *ardentem frigidus*²², has always struck Horace’s admirers with consternation²³.

²² Commentators are puzzled : gratuitous joke ? allusion to the belief that icy blood around the heart means stupidity ? reference to Empedocles’ conception explaining old age and death by

In the preceding lines, Horace was mocking the poet so full of his own verses that he loses contact with reality, and eventually falls into a well, or a pit. As the author adds: “However much he cries: ‘Help me, citizens!’ none will bother to pull him out.” If the joke stopped here, it would be in perfect taste : after all, this fool deserved a good lesson, and Horace does not wish him death anyway, he merely wonders, at v. 470, why this man keeps at making verses, for the punishment of those he grips to force them to hear his recitations.

However, with the addition of the nine lines under examination, the amusement turns rather nasty. The scatterbrained poet has become a suicidal person, or worse, a culprit it would be criminal to save. The example of Empedocles is supposed to illustrate such a verdict, since, according to the speaker, the philosopher’s claim to divinity received its due retribution. The lines 468-69 stress the point by sarcastically recalling again Empedocles’ high hopes (*nec... iam / fiet homo*), without worrying about the ambiguity of *Nec semel hoc fecit*, which is seemingly still referring to the Greek philosopher, although we should have returned to the self-satisfied poet, in order to land smoothly on v. 470. A landing the interpolator has tried however to prepare by linking up two additional *nec* to the initial *nec* of this last verse (*nec satis apparet cur uersus factitet* (“It’s not too clear why he keeps on making verses”), thus betraying himself on the contrary, for the two new negatives have no logic

a diminution of the igneous element? F. Villeneuve suggests without conviction: “s’est précipité de sang-froid dans l’Etna brûlant”. In short, readers are struggling over the (impossible) task of saving Horace... or rather his caricature.

²³ “Que dirons-nous de la détestable antithèse qu’a fournie à Horace la mort du grand poète Empédocle ; de cet homme froid qui saute dans l’Etna brûlant (v.465)? rien, sinon que ce jeu de mots indigne d’Horace va trop bien avec les mauvaises plaisanteries sur le métromane, qu’il veut absolument laisser dans le fossé ou dans le puits où il est tombé par mégarde”, Alexis Pierron: http://www.espace-horace.org/etud/pierron_2.htm

relation with the third one ; lastly, let's point out the disagreeable repetition *facit*, 467²⁴, *fecit*, 468, *factitet*, 470, as clumsy as, at the other end of the seam, the reiteration of *non sit qui tollere curet*, 460 in 46: *Si curet quis opem ferre*.

What links these six passages (ll. 445-52 included):

-some verbal connections : *uirtus*, 42 – *uirtus*, 308; *uenus*, 42 – *ueneris*, 320; *meliora*, 303 – *melius*, 321; *nugae*, 322 – *nugis... nugae*, 451 (cf. *nil tanti est*, 304)... Besides, *hoc amet, hoc spernat*, 45 announces *quid deceat, quid non*, 308, and *docebo* / *Vnde... quid... quid... quid non, quo... quo ferat error*, 306-8 typically recalls the interpolated *Aen. 6. 888-92: quae... -que docet... -que... et quo quemque modo fugiat feratque laborem*²⁵.

- the technique of insertion, either by means of verbal repetition (*ordo/ordinis*, 41-2; *uitae morumque iubebo... morataque...*, 317-19; *qui tollere curet, / Si curet quis...*, 460-61), or with the help of a sudden fit of temper, as at 212 and 445, or a sarcasm, as at 303.

- a general propensity to paddings, redundancies, empty enumerations.

- under the veil of a theorician and an adviser, a peremptory and dictatorial tone, which denotes a man used to be obeyed without a word.

²⁴ This line 467, unique example of a spondaic verse in the whole *Sermones* d'Horace (a mystery, according to C. O. Brink : "Its purpose here has not been explained"), was suppressed by Ribbeck and Mueller.

²⁵ Cf. *La Lettre de Pallas* 5 (1997), 17. It's true that these lines 306-8 plagiarize 312-16, but in 312-16 there is no trace of presumptuousness, and their content is very dense, whereas in 306-8 (as in *Aen. 6. 888-92*) the burden of the syntactical armature seems to be directly proportional to the emptiness of the thought.

- a dark coloration, made of sarcasm, *invidia* (hatred and jealousy together), surly disposition, underlying menace.

- a boundless pretension, a craving for absolute domination, inclusively over the greatest geniuses, either contemporaries or in history.

Everybody (I surmise) will have identified this sinister, and farcical, character with the emperor Augustus, and it only remains to rapidly reexamine one by one each of his five interventions²⁶, in order to penetrate his thought and try to find out his secret and shameful intentions.

Verses 42-45:

The apparent platitude of the statement (“you must not say all at the same time”), and the abstruseness of the expression could well conceal a strong warning aimed at the dissident poets, and Horace in the first place: “let him say from now on, yes, from now on, what it’s his duty to say (the politically correct), postponing the rest, or rather omitting it (*praesens in tempus* – instead of *in futurum* (cf. *supra* n. 3) – fits in with the injunction made by the double *iam nunc*); let him make all his choices according to the ‘correct’ political line.”

Verses 212-13 :

To Horace, this son of an emancipated slave, who allows himself to criticize the brilliant Roman civilization of the time, Augustus retorts with an aristocratic haughtiness: “How can you say that, you, an ignorant, you, a country bumpkin, you, a dead loss ?” The abusive *indoctus* discredits Horace as a literary critic, *rusticus* refers to his provincial origins, *turpis* (and perhaps even

²⁶ The sixth one has been examined elsewhere : see *supra* n. 1.

liber laborum)²⁷ to his father's social status²⁸. As for *confusus*, let's remember that Augustus devoted his whole attention to avoiding the mixing of classes²⁹.

Verses 303-8:

The *nil tanti est*, 304 (“it’s not worth it”) is a slap on the face of poets, and an insult to poetry. Rising above this ‘miserable’ microcosm (Mount Parnassus!), Augustus pretends to dictate it his own laws: *munus*, *officium*, *formet*, *deceat*, *uirtus*, *error* belong to the lexical field of ethics³⁰; *opes* and *alat* could allude to the reward promised to obedient writers: “how poets can grow richer, what feeds them, what shapes them (according to my own criteria)”.

Verses 319-22:

Nugaeque canorae (“melodious nonsense”), 322 reiterates the insult aimed at high poetry with *nil tanti est*. Some could feel reassured by recalling that Catullus in the opening piece of his *Libellus* termed *nugae* his own verses, but the word on his lips was profoundly ironic (“what YOU (Cornelius) consider

²⁷ The phrase *liber laborum* is particularly perverse, for, even though the man aimed at is a free citizen (*liber*), this quality is scarcely conceded to him before it is taken back, and denied, by this unwonted genitive : “free... from his tasks”, i.e. idle, i.e. (by implication), lazy : fundamentally a slave, *turpis*, but a slave who twiddles his thumbs.

²⁸ That this is actually an attack *ad hominem* is verified by the echo to *Sat.* 1. 6. 63-4 : *placui tibi qui turpi secernis honestum / Non patre praeclaro, sed uita et pectore puro*, “And I think it’s fine / To have pleased you, who separate true from false, / Not by a man’s father but by his pure life and heart.” For what else are doing our lines 212-13 than judging people after their social origins ?

²⁹ Suet., *Aug.* 40 et 44.

³⁰ “We are probably not meant to distinguish between moral and literary values”, notes Niall Rudd, *ad loc.* Unless literary values are only a smoke screen here... The wicked ambiguousness of *opes* and *alat* should be enough to confirm our suspicions.

trifles”)³¹. Needless to precise that the first targets of these lines are Horace, Virgil and their friends, who had a high and uncompromising idea of poetry.

Verses 461-69:

The man who in Horace’s Ode 1. 28 (as a speaker) backbites Archytas and Pythagoras³², the man who sneaks in *De Rerum Natura* in order to insult Heraclitus³³, we are not surprised to see him now making fun of the great Empedocles. But of course, his real concern is not about history, but about current times, and there is some evidence that Empedocles is little more here than a disguise to hide Virgil. By the fact, such a phrase as *Siculi que poetae* should prompt the reader to the author of the *Bucolics*, Virgil, whose Corydon proudly proclaims: *Mille meae Siculis errant in montibus agnae* (*Ecl.* 2. 21). It is well known that the *Bucolics* are placed under the invocation of *Sicelides Musae*, “Sicilian Muses” (*Ecl.* 4. 1), and Donatus, Virgil’s biographer, informs us that the poet usually resided in Campania or in Sicilia³⁴. Assuredly, Virgil did not throw himself into a volcano, but only... into the lion’s mouth, when he had to appear for interview with the prince who was awaiting him at Athens. However, the verdict *Sit ius liceatque perire poetis*, under the guise of humour, resonates sinisterly (“Let poets have the legal right to die”). By adding *inuitum*

³¹ This is a flagrant case of ‘focalization’ : cf. *Catulle ou l’anti-César*, 224-29. When Horace assumes the word, as in *Epist.* 2. 2. 141 (*Nimirum sapere est abiectis utile nugis*), it’s in order to mark his contempt of occasional verse in opposition to the authentic poetry, which obeys to reason (*Ars*, 309 : *Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons*).

³² http://www.espace-horace.org/jym/odes_1/O_I_28.htm

³³ <http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/lucr.pdf>. Horace himself naturally reveres Democritus (cf. *Epist.* 2. 1. 194), who on the contrary is brought here (v. 297) into disrepute by those “imitators, slavish herd” denounced in *Epist.* 1. 19. 19, and by anti-Ego (Augustus) in *Epist.* 12. 12 : cf. J.-Y. Maleuvre, “Iccius et Pompeius, ou Horace a-t-il vraiment jeté son bouclier à Philippes? (*Odes* I, 29, II, 7 et 16, *Epist.* I, 12)”.

³⁴ Suet.-Donat, *Vita Verg.* 13-14.

qui seruat, idem facit occidenti (“To save somebody against his will amounts to killing him”), the author cynically justifies his crimes (in the same manner as Damoetas in the third eclogue)³⁵: they are (those poets) suicidal and furious persons, who definitely want to die. “Actually, I cannot be accused for having condemned those dissidents to death³⁶, since they condemned themselves, and it is if I had spared them that I would have killed them.” Everybody will appreciate this logic.

4. Numerical evidence

Without entering the thorny dispute about the scheme followed by Horace in the *Ars Poetica*, let’s observe that the principle of a tripartite division meets with a large consensus³⁷, a distribution 1-152, 153-294, 295-476 perhaps winning most approval³⁸. But there is a problem: in the present, ‘orthodox’ state of the text, the second section is comparatively too short (142 lines), while the third one is disproportionate (182 lines)³⁹. Admittedly, the stop at v. 294 could very well be moved to v. 308, the sequence 295-308 making a transition, and the *sententia* of v. 309 being altogether suitable to start a new section; but the imbalance would still remain: 152, 156, 168. On the contrary, after the

³⁵ *Ecl.* 3. 21-24, in relation with *Cat.* 76 : cf. *Violence et ironie...*, 199-201.

³⁶ For the secret presence of this death sentence at lines 446-47 (*atrum... signum*), cf. <http://www.virgilmurder.org/images/pdf/sphinx.pdf>, pp. 8-9.

³⁷ “le plus souvent”, according to Plessis-Lejay 582.

³⁸ See for instance G. Ramain, “Horace, *Art Poétique*”, *Revue de Philologie*, 53 (1927), 246, O. Immisch, “Horazens Epistel über die Dichtkunst”, *Philologus*, Suppl. XXIV, 1932, 10 ff., F. Villeneuve 188, J. Perret 199 ; G. E. Duckworth, *Structural patterns and proportions in Vergil’s Aeneid*, Ann Arbor, 1962, 229 : *poesis, poema, poeta*.

³⁹ J. Perret 199 writes nevertheless: “trois parties très justement équilibrées: l’œuvre d’art (1-152) ; le poème dramatique (153-294); le poète (295-476)”.

suppression of the 33 fraudulent lines (42-45 = 4 lines; 212-13 = 2 lines; 303-8 = 6 lines ; 319-22 = 4 lines; 445-52 = 8 lines; 461-69 = 9 lines), the total of *Ars Poetica* being so reduced to 443 lines, one gets three blocks strictly equal, but for one line in the third section⁴⁰:

- 1) 1 à 152 (= 148)
- 2) 153 (=149) à 302 (=296): 148 lines
- 3) 309 (= 297) à 476 (= 443): 147 lines.

Regarding the missing line, we are free either to suppose that it never existed, or that it was suppressed by the imperial forger.

Conclusion

To his detractors who accused him of plagiarism, Virgil used to retort that it is more difficult to steal a verse from Homer than to snatch his club from Hercules' hands. But it is not easy either to pretend to add a line to Horace, all the more if you are not especially gifted.- jym

⁴⁰ The case of the lines 178 and 349 is discussed by C. O. Brink *ad loc.*; the proposition of rejection of lines 63 to 69, defended by J. Schwartz, *Revue de Philologie* 21 (1947), 49-54, has not met approval from philologists.