Answerable Style

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Horace's *Ars poetica* in the Medieval Classroom and Beyond

The Horizons of Ancient Precept

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When does a classic of criticism become a classic? When, under what conditions, does it manifest those supposedly abiding characteristics that make it a classic, giving it the heft of a global pronouncement? Perhaps when it has outlived its familiar and daily usefulness.

Modern readers put Horace's *Ars poetica* in a category with Aristotle's *Poetics*, as a text that long served as an authority of evaluative standards, establishing the canon of classicism for humanist and Neoclassical critics (from Scaliger and Sidney to Boileau, Dryden, Pope, and others). Like Aristotle's *Poetics*, the *Ars poetica* became a founding text of a metadiscourse about literature across linguistic traditions, providing a critical standard of literary form and style, decorum, and moral function. It articulated a classical norm of canon-building through imitation and translation. It came to stand as an ancient cornerstone of what we now construct—retrospectively—as the "history" of literary theory. Beginning in the sixteenth century, commentators explicitly harmonized Horatian with Aristotelian doctrine, fusing the precepts of the two works in ways that seem at times wishful, and in so doing elevated Horace's work to a new philosophical status. This development has been much studied by historians of early modern and Neoclas-

sical aesthetics.[1] The *Ars poetica* provided a key classical justification for the notion of poetry as an epistemology.

But as medievalists know, this was not how the *Ars poetica* was read and used during the first seven or eight hundred years of its post-classical history. From late antiquity to the thirteenth century, the *Ars poetica* was treated as a pragmatic classroom text, a source of practical information for students learning how to compose their own grammatical exercises, a fixture of the grammar curriculum. Simply put, it was a composition and style guide. It was also profoundly identified with Latinity in the most elementary sense of that term: it was used in contexts where the learning of Latin involved both acquiring a new language and acquiring the very skills of literacy, that is, where to become literate was to leave one's native language behind and take up Latin letters. Here, the *Ars poetica* served as a first passage into the mechanics of composition, an introductory textbook.

What was the event, or change of conditions, that transformed the status of the *Ars poetica* from quotidian school text and humble composition art to global theoretical authority? The unexamined response would be recourse to periodization paradigms: the humanists of the sixteenth century saw something in the *Ars poetica* that the Middle Ages had failed to see, and integrated it in a classical (or classicized) framework. This is not inaccurate, but neither is it the whole story; and I think the more interesting turn of the story is what happened to the *Ars poetica* in the Middle Ages to render it newly visible to scholars of later periods. Under what circumstances was the *Ars poetica* allowed to grow up?

One productive avenue to approach this question is translation of the *Ars poetica* into European vernaculars. The first translations are surprisingly late: the earliest was the Italian translation by Lodovico Dolce in 1535, followed by Jacques Pelletier du Mans' French translation in 1545, and Thomas Drant's English translation in 1567. This is especially curious given that some of its central doctrine concerns interlingual translation or imitation: indeed, along with Cicero's *De optimo genere oratorum*, the *Ars poetica* is a

1. R. Stillers, *Humanistische Deutung: Studien zu Kommentar und Literaturtheorie in der italienischen Renaissance* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1988), 107–24; Daniel Javitch, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics* in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol.* 3, *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53–65; Glenn Most, "Classical Scholarship and Literary Criticism," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol.* 4, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 742–57. The essays in Charles Martindale and David Hopkins, eds., *Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), provide useful perspectives on reception, although not specific to histories of aesthetics and ideas.

founding text in the history of translation theory, quoted and memorialized by Jerome and Boethius.[2] Medieval commentators on the text were perfectly aware that there was a theory of translation embedded in Horace's advice about imitation, and duly record their understandings of these principles.[3] But if medieval *translators* from Latin into vernaculars, or between two vernaculars, consciously deployed the Horatian precept to avoid rendering *verbum verbo* like a *fidus interpres*, they saw no apparent use in translating the actual source of that precept; and this in an era that saw many translations of useful academic and scientific works—Ciceronian rhetorics in Italian, Spanish, and French, Aristotle's political, ethical, and scientific writings in French, translations of encyclopedias, even vernacular translations of the basic Latin grammar (the *Ars minor*) of Donatus.[4]

This is evidence that the *Ars poetica* in the Middle Ages was almost exclusively associated with Latinity, and despite its celebrated teaching about translation, its application did not extend beyond an all-Latin context. The late appearance of the first translations suggests that only when it was no longer necessary to this specific but ubiquitous Latinate function was it intellectually "available" to be translated into various vernaculars. In these vernacular milieus, its orientation was diffused and generalized. The French and English translations were affiliated with, or even gave rise to, the formation of vernacular literary circles—Pelletier du Mans' translation with the Pléiade group in France and Drant's with Sidney's Pembroke circle in England.[5] The fusion of Aristotelian and Horatian principles by humanist commentators began early in the sixteenth century and then progressed alongside the vari-

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2. Jerome, *De optimo genere interpretandi* (*Ep.* 57), ed. G. J. M. Bartelink (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Boethius, *In Isagogen Porphyrii*, ed. Samuel Brandt, CSEL 48 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1906), 135; W. Schwarz, "The Meaning of *fidus interpres* in Medieval Translation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 73–78.

3. See the texts edited in Margareta Fredborg, "*Difficile est proprie communia dicere* (Horats, A.P. 128): Horatsfortolkningens bidrag til middelalderens poetik," *Museum Tusculanum* 40–43 (1980): 583–97.

4. Virginia Cox, "Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy," in *The Rhetoric of Cicero in Its Medieval and Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 109–43; Leopold Delisle, "Notice sur la Rhétorique de Cicéron, traduite par Maitre Jean d'Antioche, MS 590 du Musée Condé," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 36 (1899): 207–65; Jacques Monfrin, "Humanisme et traductions au Moyen Âge," *Journal des savants* 148 (1963): 161–90; Brian Merrilees, "Teaching Latin in French: Adaptations of Donatus' *Ars minor*," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1987): 87–98. For further examples of learned translation, readers may consult Roger Ellis, ed., *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English,* vol. 1: *To 1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

5. The best general account of this is still Elizabeth Jelliffe MacIntire, "French Influence on the Beginnings of English Classicism," *PMLA* 26 (1911): 496–527; see especially 508–10.

ous translation movements; clearly the heightened theoretical interest in the *Ars poetica* helped to extend its influence into vernacular circles.[6]

But herein lies a great historical paradox: the classicism with which the Renaissance newly invested the *Ars poetica* helped to propel it out of its classical form (Latin) into various vernaculars, where it assumed the mantle of classical metatext about the power of poetry. Once translated, it achieved the status of metadiscourse precisely because, as a classical authority, it could be "de-classicized" and stand for the ambitions of all vernacular poetics. The best example of this is the use that Joachim du Bellay made of it in his *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse*, written in 1549 (four years after Pelletier du Mans' French translation of Horace), which directs French poets to build their literary language on strong imitation of classical forms, just as Horace advised Romans poets to forge their canon by appropriating Greek models.

The roots of these important changes go back to the Middle Ages. Here I would like to look closely at some medieval approaches to the *Ars poetica* and consider the use that was made of its teachings on composition and style, as well as on imitation and translation. The medieval tradition of the *Ars poetica* has been a rather specialist enterprise: it must be tracked through glosses and commentaries, some of which have been known through modern editions since the late nineteenth century, while others have come into focus through more recent scholarship.[7] The Middle Ages enshrined the *Ars poetica* in the grammar-school curriculum, along with Horace's *Satires*, *Odes*, and other *Epistles*; it also survived as a curricular fixture of Latin learning well into the sixteenth century. When we look at the character of medieval commentary on the *Ars poetica*, we can see the horizons of its usefulness, the scope but also limitations of those horizons, and begin to understand how it took on a different function for later audiences.

The Horace that medieval readers encountered was not terribly different from the Horace that presented itself to the early humanist scholars. The whole textual corpus was often copied with scholia inherited from late antiquity (comprised of glosses from as early as the fifth century). This more-or-less coherent collection of glosses is now called the Pseudo-Acronian scholia, because humanist scholars attributed it to the second-century commentator

6. The key work on the importation of Aristotelian thought into Horace's *Ars poetica* and vice versa is Marvin T. Herrick, *The Fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism, 1531–1555*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 32 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1946).

7. Scevola Mariotti, ed., *Orazio: Enciclopedia oraziana*, 3 vols. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996–98), especially vol. 3 on the receptions of Horace; for an overview see also Karsten Friis-Jensen, "Horace and the Early Writers of Arts of Poetry," in *Sprachtheorien in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Sten Ebbesen (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1995), 360–401.

Acron (whose glosses may or may not be represented in the existing corpus). Another group of glosses was associated with the third-century commentator Porphyrion, and although we no longer have these in their original form, they were incorporated into other groups of glosses, including the Pseudo-Acronian matter.[8] The earliest humanist commentators made use of these glosses in their treatments of the *Ars poetica*, but what they took from them was apparently quite different from what the medieval readers and teachers found in them. In particular, the tradition of the Porphyrion glosses was oriented to younger students, and focused on grammar and style. But much the same could be said of the Pseudo-Acronian scholia. The glosses tend to paraphrase the text and give synonyms for words used in an unusual sense or form. It is not surprising that these scholia were copied in so many medieval manuscripts of Horace, for they are relatively simple and explanatory in their purpose. It is interesting, therefore, that the humanist commentators used the same glosses to launch what were altogether more philosophical approaches to the *Ars poetica*, that is, incorporating those glosses into their new editions and explanations. Various other groups of medieval glosses, including a group of Carolingian glosses known as the *Scholia Vindobonensia* (the Vienna Glosses), and groups of glosses extending from the sixth century to the ninth century, developed along the lines of the Porphyrion glosses, and expanded their teachings on certain points in response to increasingly complex demands of pedagogical interpretation.[9]

To understand the kind of use that Horace's *Ars poetica* served in the medieval classroom, we can turn to one of the most developed glosses, less a gloss than a full-fledged commentary, from the middle of the twelfth century. The modern editor of this commentary, Karsten Friis-Jensen, named it the "Materia" commentary, after its opening word.[10] The "Materia" commentary is important to our understanding of the role that the *Ars poetica* performed in medieval classrooms, and how teachers adapted it to suit new

8. Otto Keller, ed., *Pseudacronis scholia in Horatium vetustiora,* 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1902–4).

9. J. Zechmeister, ed., *Scholia Vindobonensia ad Horatii artem poeticam* (Vienna: C. Geroldum, 1877); H. J. Botschuyver, ed., *Scholia in Horatium codicum parisinorum latinorum 7972, 7974, 7971* (Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1935); Botschuyver, ed., *Scholia in Horatium codicum parisinorum latinorum 10310 et 7973* (Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1939); Botschuyver, ed., *Scholia in Horatium in codicibus parisinis latinis 17897 et 8223* (Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1942). On these see Karsten Friis-Jensen, "Medieval Commentaries on Horace," in *Medieval and Renaissance Scholarship*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Birger Munk Olsen (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51–73; and Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Classical Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13 and notes.

10. Karsten Friis-Jensen, ed., "The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France: The Horace of Matthew of Vendôme, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and John of Garland," *Cahiers de l'Institut du Moyen Âge grec et latin* 60 (1990): 319–88.

demands. Medieval grammar students were taught how to compose by imitating the examples from classical poetry, which they also expounded for grammatical usage. The *Ars poetica* served to reinforce these exercises, with its teaching on decorum, the faults of style, coherence of narrative, poetic license, and imitation of traditional materials. The "Materia" commentary exemplifies how medieval teachers went beyond the late antique glosses to link Horace's precepts to the compositional needs of their students. Its most distinctive feature is its opening, which develops Horace's advice about stylistic decorum and the corresponding faults of style into a simple, prescriptive list of six faults to avoid in composing poems. The teacher has rationalized and ordered Horace's advice in the opening thirty-seven lines into a coherent and virtually stand-alone doctrine (and indeed, this introduction on the six faults and their corresponding virtues also circulated independently of the whole commentary).[11]

> The material [*materia*] of the author in this work is the art of poetry. His intention is to give precepts concerning the art of poetry. The cause of this intention is twofold: one is general and one is specific. The general cause is that he might instruct any erring poets in the art of poetry. The particular cause, that is, the personal purpose, is so that he might instruct the Pisones, at whose request he undertook this work. . . . The precepts are given in two ways, first in showing which faults are to be avoided, and second which virtues are to be sought out. Thus he first teaches what is to be avoided, and with the errors of style purged, he then adds the rules and precepts of the art of poetry. For as he says in his Epistles, "Unless the vessel is clean, whatever you pour in turns sour."[12]
>
> There are six faults to be avoided in poetic composition; not that there are not others, but these are the chief ones.
>
> The first of these is the incongruous placing of the parts [*partium incongrua positio*]. The parts of a work are the beginning, the middle, and the end. Parts are placed incongruously when the beginning is discordant with the middle, and the middle is discordant with the end. Horace censures this by likening it to a picture, where he says: "If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse" (*AP* 1–2). For congruent placing

11. Translation in Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, A.D. 300–1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 554–56, based on the Latin text in Friis-Jensen, "The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France," 336–38. Translations from the *Ars poetica* are based on *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*, trans. H. R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1926; repr., 1978).

12. *Epistles* 1.2.54.

of the parts is when the beginning accords with the middle, and the middle accords with the end.

The second fault is incongruent digression [*incongrua orationis digressio*]. One digresses by abandoning the course of one's speech for something else which does not pertain to the matter. Horace condemns this fault where he says: "Works with noble beginning and grand promises often have one or two purple patches so stitched on as to glitter far and wide" (*AP* 14–15). However, there can also be a congruent digression, when one strays from the theme for a useful purpose, digressing to another topic to the advantage of the argument. This was the method that Cicero followed in the *Verrines*. . . . This is also what Virgil does at the beginning of the *Aeneid*. . . . You will be able to recognize this method as a whole in the digressions of other authors.

The third fault is obscure brevity [*brevitas obscura*], which happens when one wants to speak concisely, but does not make clear the things that he ought to say. Horace criticizes this where he says "Striving to be brief, I become obscure" (*AP* 25–26). But there is also an appropriate form of brevity that explains clearly and does not produce obscurity.

The fourth fault is incongruous variation in style. There are three manners of speaking, which some call styles, others call types [*figurae*], and others call characters: the simple or low style, the middle style, and the grand style [*humilis stilus, mediocris et altus*]. The low style is when someone uses simple or humble words about people of low station, as in comedy. The middle style is when we treat people of middle status in words of a middle type, as in satire. The grand style is when we treat people of high status in grand words, as in tragedy. But each of these styles has its own corresponding fault which is very close to it. The middle style has the fault of drifting and of being loose [*fluctuans et dissolutum*]. . . . Horace criticizes this where he says: "Aiming at smoothness, I fail in force and fire" (*AP* 26–27). The high style has the fault of being turgid or inflated [*turgidum et inflatum*]. . . . Horace censures this when he says "promising grandeur, it is (in fact) bombastic" (*AP* 27). The simple style has the fault of being arid and bloodless [*aridum et exsangue*]. . . . Horace criticizes this where he says that one who is "overcautious and fearful of the gale, creeps along the ground" (*AP* 28). Here, however, we can point to no corresponding virtue, as we did for the other faults.

The fifth fault is the incongruous variation of material [*incongrua materie variatio*], which happens when one's subject matter is left aside and something else is introduced, but is found clashing, either by clumsy variation or by a discordant mode of exposition. Horace criticizes this where he

talks about the one "who tries to vary a single subject in monstrous fashion" (*AP* 29). There is an acceptable form of varying the material, when a subject matter is left aside in favor of something else which embellishes it and which avoids clashes, as we see in Virgil, when he leaves aside his subject matter and invents the story of how Aeneas came to Dido. . . . And it is only appropriate to poets to vary their material, since they intersperse history with fiction. Whence they are called poets, that is, makers. For "*poire*"[13] means "to make." And this is the difference between variation of material and digression of speech: to vary the material is appropriate to poets only, but to digress from the speech is appropriate both to poets and historians.

The sixth fault is an incongruous incompleteness of the work [*incongrua operis imperfectio*], which happens when someone begins to write, but either from ignorance or negligence does not bring what was started to a close. Horace criticizes this by an extended comparison with a bronze-founder, where he says, "Near the Aemilian School . . . there is a craftsman who in bronze will mold nails and imitate waving locks, but is unhappy in the total result, because he cannot represent a whole figure" (*AP* 32–37) . . .

The utility of this work is the science of poetic composition, that is, making good verses. The title is "Here begins the book of Poetics of Horace," or "Here begins Horace's book on the Art of Poetry," which means the same thing. The meaning is: "Here begin the precepts on the Art of Poetry." For *poio, pois*[14] is "I make, you make." Whence *poesis* or *poetria*, i.e. a creation [*fictio*] or anything made [*figmentum*], and the poet is one who makes [*fictor*].

With these preliminary matters concluded, let us move to the literal exposition.

The "Materia" commentary gives the doctrine of poetic unity and self-consistency another kind of classroom cast: it reinterprets Horace's precepts in light of the teaching of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.8.11) about levels of style. In the *Ad Herennium*, the doctrine of the low, middle, and high styles represents distinctions among verbal styles. But among medieval commentators there was a growing tendency, marked from the mid-twelfth century onwards, to associate the three styles with levels of subject matter and social status (characters of low, middle, or exalted position).[15] In the "Mate-

13. A corruption of Greek *poiein*.

14. That is, Greek *poiô, poieis*.

15. See Friis-Jensen, "Horace and the Early Writers of Arts of Poetry," 375–78; and for background on the distinction between verbal and material (or social) conceptions of levels of style, see

ria" commentary, the treatment of "incongruous variation of style" is a mixture of Horatian criticism, prescriptive rhetoric, and a newer identification of stylistic register with social estates.

We know that this treatment of decorum and style was meant to reach a student audience, because its own reception history clearly links it to later pedagogical texts. Friis-Jensen's studies have shown the direct impact of the "Materia" commentary on the pedagogical genre that emerged around the turn of the twelfth century, the Latin *ars poetriae* or art of poetry. These were works aimed at students learning Latin and developing their compositional skills by imitating classical models. The importance of the "Materia" commentary for these medieval pedagogical arts is that its Horatian doctrine seems to have passed directly to some of them, notably the *Ars versificatoria* of Matthew of Vendôme (before 1175), Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* (ca.1199), and the *Parisiana poetria* by John of Garland (ca. 1230). These texts take over the simplified system of the six faults of style, showing how Horace's teaching could be reduced to an accessible, iterable, and thus highly practical scheme aimed at students at an intermediate level (as well as any level of student needing instruction in Latin composition).[16]

Horace's famous advice on imitation of traditional materials presented interesting difficulties to the earliest scholiasts. The lines in question are these:

> Aut famam sequere aut sibi convenientia finge. . . .
> Difficile est proprie communia dicere; tuque
> rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
> quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.
> publica materies privati iuris erit, si
> non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem,
> nec verbo verbum curabis reddere fidus
> interpres, nec desilies imitator in artum,
> unde pedem proferre pudor vetet aut operis lex. . . . (119, 128–35)

Franz Quadlbauer, *Die antike Theorie der genera dicendi im lateinischen Mittelalter* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlaus, 1962), 34–39; and Douglas Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose,* Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental, fasc. 59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 71–78. Edmond Faral finds the earliest move toward a material application of style in a Horace commentary that predates the eleventh century: see *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1924), 86–88.

16. See the studies by Friis-Jensen, "The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France" and "Horace and the Early Writers of Arts of Poetry."

> Either follow traditional materials [*fama*] or make up [*finge*] something that is self-consistent. . . . It it hard to treat *proprie* [*"as your own" or "appropriately"*] those things that are *communia* [= *either "commonplace," i.e. what has already been treated by others, or "communal," untreated or unclaimed material*].[17] You are doing better stretching into acts a song of Troy than if, for the first time, you were presenting something unknown and unheard. Public ground [*publica materies*] will be private property if you do not linger along the broad and open pathway, if you do not attempt to render word for word as a *fidus interpres* [= "*faithful translator*" *or "faithful interpretor/expositor*"], and if, as imitator, you do not leap into the narrow bind out of which either shame or the rule of craft will prevent you from stepping forth.[18]

The direction that this advice takes depends on how the term *communia* is read, and the tale of possible explanations for this contested passage is a long one. Charles Brink, whose annotation of the *Ars poetica* is a comprehensive resource on the text and its scholia tradition, assumes that the intended meaning of *communia* is "new" or "untried subjects," or by extension, "generalities," and that the advice should be taken to mean that it is hard and thus disadvantageous to attempt new or general subjects; one should rather follow traditional materials and make them one's own.[19] But unlike Brink, I am more interested in the way that this was received than in interpreting it correctly according to Horace's intention. The scholia of Porphyrion and the Pseudo-Acron interpreted *communia* in two ways: as "untried subjects," in which case it is better to appropriate well-known stories; or in exactly the opposite way, as "communal" or "familiar subjects," which the poet should appropriate as his own in spite of the difficulty that attends this enterprise. So either way, *communia* represent difficulty, because they are untold and untried, or because they are well worn.

The "Materia" commentary casts a wide net in its interpretation of this passage. It accommodates both positions inherited from the scholia tradition, and ultimately comes down in favor of imitating traditional material:

> Now "it is difficult to treat in a way that is *proprie*" subjects that have not been heard; which means "it is difficult to treat in a way that is *proprie,*"

17. See the discussion of this point below.

18. Latin text and translation (with minor alterations) from Fairclough, ed. and trans., *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*.

19. C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry*, vol. 2: *The "Ars poetica"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963–82), 204–7.

> that is, suitably [*competenter*], "things which are *communia*," that is, subjects that have not been heard. He says *communia*, because these subjects [i.e. untried themes] are available for development to everyone in common. "You are doing better." However difficult and thus praiseworthy it may be, it is nevertheless more praiseworthy to follow tradition. And this is the meaning of "You are doing better" etc. Or, this whole passage concerning the treatment of traditional material may be read in the following way. "It is difficult" etc., as if he'd said, "I talked about using traditional material or making up something self-consistent; however, it is more praiseworthy to use traditional and "common" material [*famam sequi et communia*], that is, matter that is familiar [*trita*] to all, and to "treat it suitably [*proprie*]": for this is difficult. . . And because it is difficult, it is praiseworthy.[20]

Where Horace seems to advise using traditional material because the alternative, making up something new, is fraught with danger, the medieval commentary makes a positive virtue out of imitation, because—on its reading—it is more challenging and rewarding to treat familiar material in a suitable or "proper" way. The medieval commentary seems to direct its advice to those who will be doing most of their work imitating established and familiar models, that is, intermediate students who will be producing their own compositions from assigned models and discovering their subjects in matter familiar from poetic tradition.

The commentary treats the next lines, "nec verbo verbum curabis reddere fidus interpres," in quite an uncontroversial way. It recognizes that this passage is about interlingual translation, and about the difficulties that might arise when seeking verbal equivalence:

> perhaps he would come upon some word that cannot be expressed adequately in both languages; and thus he ought not render word for word . . . it is as if he said that you should seek to translate the sense, not the words. One will be a *fidus interpres* if one should attempt to account for every word.[21]

However, we can learn a great deal by looking at how readers of the "Materia" commentary in turn interpreted the Horatian advice about the *fidus interpres*. Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria*, written before 1175, is

20. My translation from the Latin text in Friis-Jensen, "The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France," 353.

21. My translation from the Latin text in Friis-Jensen, "The *Ars Poetica* in Twelfth-Century France," 354.

clearly dependent on the "Materia" commentary, as Friis-Jensen has shown, and also finds its own way to the Horatian text. Matthew takes Horace's warning against the *fidus interpres* in a way that patently links its value to the schoolroom:

> We turn now to the treatment of material, in which certain ill-trained people habitually overstep the line and shamefully depart from preceptive guidlines. When paraphrasing poetic fables in school exercises, they render word for word, down to every figure of speech, as if they sought to produce a metrical commentary on the authors . . . One should not try to render word for word like a *fidus interpres*.[22]

Clearly Matthew understands the *fidus interpres* as "slavish expositor," not a translator. More importantly, he applies Horace's advice to the context where it seems Horace was most valued: the school exercises in poetic composition, the paraphrasing and imitating that had been the staple of the grammar classroom since Quintilian's day. For Matthew of Vendôme, Horace's precepts on literary imitation find their audience, not among enterprising poets, but among students struggling to master composition in a language not their own, in a setting where the acquisition of literacy means immersion in a foreign language. Horace's dictates serve to reinforce a grammar lesson and encourage students to demonstrate some ingenuity in their performance of routine compositional exercises.

Thus we have a picture of the role of the *Ars poetica* in the medieval classroom. But from the streamlining of Horace's teaching on style that we find in the "Materia" commentary, we can also see something of the pedagogical limitations or deficiencies of the *Ars poetica* for medieval teaching by the middle of the twelfth century. The teachers had to rationalize and systematize the rather diffuse teaching of the *Ars poetica*. The *Ars poetica* is elusive in its advice, it speaks to fellow poets rather than to students, and of course it assumes the nativeness of Latin as well as the Greek-Latin bilingualism of the Roman cultural outlook. It is arguably a work about the norms of judgment and taste, evaluating the Roman assimilation of the Greek literary canon. But for all of its sophisticated insight, the *Ars poetica* was becoming inadequate to fulfill the pedagogical purposes that it had served for many centuries. Grammar teachers were developing new ways of approaching the changing needs of their students, and looking for a more structured and consolidated approach to Latin composition, an approach that could go hand in

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22. *Ars versificatoria*, ed. Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XII et du XIII siècle*, 180 (my translation).

hand with the teaching of Latin as a foreign language. This need was quickly filled by that highly successful pedagogical genre, the *ars poetriae,* those independent prescriptive treatises that adapted older teachings to new purposes, giving students clear and straightforward advice about how to compose. The core of this new genre can be seen in the opening of the "Materia" commentary, with its summary of six faults of style and their corresponding virtues: from that core the new genre of the *ars poetriae* spun out like an industry.

The most successful of the *artes poetriae* was Geoffrey of Vinsauf's versified treatise, the *Poetria nova*, written over the first decade of the thirteenth century. This treatise had a vast circulation throughout the later Middle Ages and well into the early modern period: it survives in more than two hundred manuscripts, and was used in nearly every corner of Western and Central Europe. It is, indeed, still the most anthologized of the medieval arts of poetry (there are three different modern English translations of it). So successful was it as a classroom text that it soon acquired its own commentary and gloss tradition. As the work of Marjorie Curry Woods demonstrates, the *Poetria nova* penetrated into every level of teaching and every kind of outlook: from elementary to advanced, from the late medieval cloister even to the humanist studium.[23] The title *Poetria nova,* which apparently was not Geoffrey's working title, was conferred on the text during the generations that followed Geoffrey's composition, pointing to its growing reception as a new "rival" to Horace's "old" poetics.[24]

This has important implications for the fortunes of the *Ars poetica*. The medieval arts of poetry, and especially Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, assumed many of the functions that Horace's text had played in medieval schools. Indeed, one way in which the *Poetria nova* took the genre of the *ars poetriae* forward was to move away from strict dependence on the text of Horace's *Ars poetica*. Where the earliest of the *artes poetriae*, Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria* and Geoffrey's own *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi*, gave much space to citation of Horace's *Ars* (and in the case of Geoffrey's *Documentum* made an explicit claim to covering the same matter as Horace[25]), the *Poetria nova* substitutes its own newly synthetic teaching, a combination of Horatian doctrine and the more ambitious precept of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. In what Martin Camargo has

23. Marjorie Curry Woods, *Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the "Poetria Nova" across Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009).

24. Martin Camargo, "From *Liber versuum* to *Poetria nova*: The Evolution of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Masterpiece," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 21 (2011): 1-16. I am grateful to Professor Camargo for allowing me to read his article before its publication. See also Woods, *Classroom Commentaries*, 14 n. 62, 34, 99.

25. *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* 2.3.162, ed. Faral, *Les arts poétiques*, 317.

described as the "evolution" of the *Poetria nova* over the course of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's career as a grammar master, the poem came into being as a new kind of product, the sum of Geoffrey's experience not only in the classroom but as a composer of illustrative verse set pieces, which he substituted for the classical examples that he used in his earlier treatise.[26] In this way, then, the *Poetria nova* could present, not just a new extension of Horatian teaching, but a revisionist alternative to the ancient *Ars.*

The *Poetria nova* fulfilled many of the teaching aims of the *Ars poetica*, but in a way that was more systematic and user-friendly, and in a way that specifically addressed what students needed to know.[27] It gives substantial attention to the structure of a composition, and its advice about how to develop a narrative is geared to the classroom situation of working from a model text or a familiar subject: this is the purpose of its famous teaching about amplifying and abbreviating a theme. It also has a clear section on stylistic embellishment (*elocutio*), giving all the figures of speech, figures of thought, and tropes along with explanations of them and examples from classical poets.

Horace's *Ars poetica* certainly did not lapse into any kind of obscurity with the ascendancy of Geoffrey's *Poetria nova*. The *Ars poetica* continued to be copied, possibly as many times during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as up to 1300.[28] Sometimes the *Ars poetica* is found in the very manuscripts that contain the *Poetria nova*.[29] Clearly it continued to be read and valued, for its own sake as a classical text and for the authority that it lent to the modern works that were more immediately suited to day to day teaching in medieval schools. Woods comments that the appearance of the *Ars poetica* in manuscripts with Geoffrey's treatise suggests that the *Poetria nova* did not replace Horace's *Ars* but complemented it. I believe that such complementarity was surely the intention of the medieval copyists and schoolmasters. But the long historical impact of the new *artes poetriae* transformed the role and position of Horace's *Ars poetica.*

One index of the practical usefulness of the *Ars poetica* is its penetration into literary culture. We can judge this in large part by the extent to which it is cited. It is cited in the places where one would expect to find it, in other academic and pedagogical writings: surveys of canonical authors (e.g.,

26. Camargo, "From *Liber versuum* to *Poetria nova*."

27. See Woods, *Classroom Commentaries*, 12–14, 128.

28. "Nobody has seen all the manuscripts of H[orace]." Brink, *Horace on Poetry,* 2:1. Hilda Buttenwieser tabulated close to 300 Horace manuscripts, of which she says 250 were copied before 1300, and hypothesized many more after that date: "Popular Authors of the Middle Ages: The Testimony of the Manuscripts," *Speculum* 17 (1942): 54.

29. Woods, *Classroom Commentaries*, 14.

Conrad of Hirsau's *Dialogus super auctores*, from the middle of the twelfth century; Hugh of Trimberg's *Registrum multorum auctorum* from the later thirteenth century), academic commentaries on classical authors (e.g., Bernardus Silvestris' commentary on Virgil, with frequent citations), and even Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia.* It is also routinely invoked in Latin literary productions, along with Horace's other poems. If its impact on teaching was a continuing one, however, it might be expected to have left an imprint in the emergent vernacular literary cultures. But vernacular authors seem to be silent about the *Ars poetica*. Here Dante may be the exception that proves the rule. He cites the *Ars poetica* several times in the *Commedia*: for example, in *Inferno* 32, he invokes the reference to Amphion building the city of Thebes through poetic song (*AP* 391-401), and in *Paradiso* 26, in Adam's discourse about the origin of languages, he alludes to Horace's comments on linguistic change (*AP* 58-72). But these are literary rather than pedagogical allusions.

By contrast, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* makes some eruptive appearances in Chaucer, where Chaucer is playing with the very idea of a teaching text which offers rules that can be either observed or comically violated. The example of the former is the well-known passage in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where the narrator gives a word-for-word Englishing of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's advice about invention in order to describe Pandarus' mental preparations for the plot that he is constructing to bring the lovers together (lines 1065-71); the example of the latter, violation of principles, could be said to be the entire *Nun's Priest's Tale*, which is a willful, egregious transgression of all the rules of decorum that the *Poetria nova* distilled from Horace, and which also cites Geoffrey of Vinsauf's lament for Richard the I as a model of the device of apostrophe (VII 3347–54). In both these contexts, Chaucer is invoking a study template that teaches craft knowledge rather than any "philosophy" of art, and it is signficant that the work he invokes is the *Poetria nova*.[30] What this could suggest is that, by the mid to late fourteenth century,

30. In two important and related articles, Martin Camargo reevaluates the evidence about the *artes poetriae* in England from the late thirteenth to the late fourteenth century. Manuscript evidence suggests that the *Poetria nova* itself was not in common use as a textbook in the curricula of the schools. Camargo argues that it only returned to widespread use in the later fourteenth century under the influence of the Oxford Benedictines and their dictaminal teaching. Chaucer's direct knowledge of the *Poetria nova* would be part of this "renaissance" of rhetoric at the end of the century. As Camargo stresses, his analysis concerns England only, not the Continent, where (as indicated by manuscript copying throughout the century) the *Poetria nova* and other *artes poetriae* maintained a continuous presence. His findings do not imply that the *artes poetriae* exerted no influence in England during this period; rather, the preservation pattern of the manuscripts indicates that their immediate presence as textbooks during these years is doubtful, although the teaching they contain would have been encountered in other derivative forms. See Camargo, "Chaucer and the Oxford Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 173–207, and "The Late Fourteenth-Century Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 45.2 (2012): 107–33.

the *Poetria nova* (and the other kinds of teaching to which it gave rise) were coming to displace the *Ars poetica* itself as quotidian guides to the craft of composition. It does not suggest that Chaucer and others did not know the *Ars poetica*, but rather that they did not think of it in the category of standard preceptive manual. This role was gradually being assumed by the *artes poetriae*, and especially the *Poetria nova*.

One further indication that the *Poetria nova* and other *artes poetriae* assumed the role of the *Ars poetica* as a fixture of instruction in an exclusively Latin classroom context is that they were never translated (until modern times), not even in the late Middle Ages, when many kinds of learned works, both classical and medieval, were vernacularized. This does not mean that the *Poetria nova* had no influence on vernacular writers: whatever was learned from it in the Latin grammar schools would certainly have filtered into the project of vernacular writing, and as Chaucer shows, the *Poetria nova* could be invoked comically as an authoritative textbook. But as was the case earlier with the *Ars poetica*, so with the *Poetria nova* throughout its classroom career, the profound identification with a Latin grammar curriculum seems to have pre-empted translating it, as if this would be supererogatory.

Horace's *Ars poetica* was gradually superseded as a pragmatic teaching text by the altogether more useful *Poetria nova*. And here, I believe, lies an important reason for the new visibility that the *Ars poetica* began to receive. In effect, the late medieval industry of the *artes poetriae*, which modern readers find so uncongenial and reductive, liberated Horace's art from its identification with classroom teaching, and made it visible as a different kind of text, a poet's poem and a standard of literary judgment.

By the late fifteenth century, the humanist scholar Cristoforo Landino had set the stage for elevating the themes of the *Ars poetica* to a moral and philosophical status, drawing on the recent enlargement of the Ciceronian corpus to claim that the poet, like the orator, must be learned in all the arts.[31] But by the middle of the sixteenth century, commentators had further enlarged their dossiers to recruit Aristotelian thought to the understanding of Horace's precepts. The *Ars poetica* became a field of philosophical reflection informed by newly assimilated Greek thought. One notable example of this is the association of the Horatian notion of decorum or suitability (as in Horace's term *convenientia*) with the Aristotelian notion of verisimilitude, that is, the necessary and the probable in the structure of events or in the representation of character (*Poetics* 1454a 33–34). Read and reinforced in

31. Cristoforo Landino, *In Q. Horatium Flaccum commentaria,* in *Opera Q. Horatii Flacci Venusini, grammaticorum antiquiss. Heleni Acronis, et Porphirionis commentariis illustrata* (Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1555), 928. See Herrick, *Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism*, 32.

this way through Aristotle, decorum became a principle not just of stylistic appropriateness but of an ethical and aesthetic sensibility.[32] Thus Thomas Drant's English translation of 1567 can render *convenientia* as "truthlyke." Similarly, the famous Horatian dictum on poetic representation, "ut pictura poesis," was infused with an Aristotelian epistemology and psychology based on the famous discussions of mimesis as a source of knowledge and pleasure at the beginning of Aristotle's *Poetics*.[33]

To account for these new approaches, we might predictably invoke humanist learning; and obviously sixteenth-century commentators had more direct access to Greek philosophy than medieval commentators. But medieval commentators were certainly no strangers to ancient philosophy, and if philosophical commentators during the Middle Ages had bothered much with the *Ars poetica*, they would have found ways to elaborate its meaning. Thus we must also look to the functions that Horace's *Ars poetica* played in the two cultures. Medieval commentators on Horace were schoolmasters, more humble and practical in their outlook than the learned scholars of the Renaissance. In other words, the function that the *Ars poetica* performed determined what kinds of commentators took it on. In the years between the thirteenth century and the sixteenth century, the work had ceased to be essential to pragmatic pedagogy, and once it was no longer inextricably linked with that world, it was available to a learned and philosophically oriented milieu.

A sign of its departure from the classroom was that it could achieve a new value as edifying recreation for adults. Queen Elizabeth's translation of a healthy portion of the *Ars poetica* dates from late in her reign, 1598, not from her youth (when she might have been expected to test her Latinity as a pedagogical exercise). Clearly for Elizabeth, thinking about the *Ars poetica* filled a need similar to the one filled by her 1593 translation of Boethius' *Consolatio*, a reprieve from burdens of state, something challenging enough to sustain voluntary attention to its complexities.[34]

Three decades earlier Thomas Drant could preface his translation of the *Ars poetica* with the argument that the *difficulty* of Horace's poem gives it greater worth than the silly love stories—the "flim-flames" and "gue-

32. The link is found in the 1550 commentary of Vincenzo Maggi (Madius); see Herrick, *The Fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism,* 55; for further context, see Javitch, "The Assimilation of Aristotle's *Poetics*."

33. See Herrick, *Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism,* 30–31.

34. Caroline Pemberton, ed., *Queen Elizabeth's Englishings of Boethius, "DCP" A.D. 1593, Plutarch, "De Curiosite," Horace, De Arte Poetica (part) A.D. 1598,* EETS o.s. 113 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899). See Riccardo Scarcia, "Elisabetta I, traduttrice dell' 'Ars Poetica,'" in *I 2000 anni dell'Ars Poetica* (Genoa: D.AR.FI.CL.ET., 1988), 55–67.

gawes"—that printers find so profitable to market. Horace, he says, is "hard, and very hard," and much harder to translate than a "love booke, a shrill tragedye, or a smothe, and plat-levyled poesie. Thys can I trulye say of myne own experyence, that I can soner translate twelve verses out of the greek Homer, than sixe oute of Horace."[35]

Once liberated from the practical constraints of the Latin grammar curriculum, the *Ars poetica* was on its way to becoming a theoretical metadiscourse. And this was the role that it assumed when it finally reached vernacular literary audiences through the various translations. Our final case in point can be Joachim du Bellay's response to Horatian dicta on translation and imitation. In *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse,* written within a few years of the French translation of the *Ars poetica*, Du Bellay recognizes the agonistic stance that Horace takes on translation and imitation of Greek sources (the same stance that Cicero had taken in *De optimo genere oratorum*):[36] the imitator should be something of a greedy predator or plunderer on behalf of his own national culture, no subservient acolyte. Thus every literary imitation executed by a French poet is part of a collective effort to augment the capacities of French. Faithful translation is useful to give access to knowledge, but as a literary enterprise it has little or no value. Du Bellay's reading of Horace on translation is oriented to a completely different mission than that of the medieval school commentaries: it aims at building an entirely new literary language rather than developing an individual style within a mono-linguistic context. Du Bellay's outlook is explicitly cultural and historical, and his reading of the *Ars poetica* is sensitive to that cultural level of argument in Horace's text that the medieval school masters seemed to filter out as irrelevent to their purposes. Du Bellay elevates Horace's precepts to trans-historical status. Modern authors should follow the standard of combative imitation set by Cicero and Virgil, who were able to enrich their language by imitating

> les meilleurs auteurs grecz, se transformant en eux, les devorant; et apres les avoir bien digerez, les convertissant en sang et nouriture, se proposant, chacun selon son naturel et l'argument qu'il vouloit elire, le meilleur aucteur, don't ilz observoint diligemment toutes les plus rare et exquises vertuz, et

35. *Horace his arte of Poetrie, pistles, and Satyrs Englished, and to the Earle of Ormounte by Tho. Drant addressed* (London, 1567) [STC (2nd ed.) 13797], sig.*6r. See also Neel Mukherjee, "Thomas Drant's Rewriting of Horace," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 40 (2000): 10.

36. Joachim du Bellay, *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse* (Paris: Crozet, 1839), 1.5; pp. 86–88.

> icelles comme grephes, ainsi que j'ai dict devant, entoint et apliquoint à leur langue [1.7].
>
> [the best Greek authors, turning themselves into them, devouring them; and after having digested them well, turning them into blood and nourishment, appropriating for themselves, each according to his nature and the argument he wished to select, the best author whose most rare and exquisite virtues they observed diligently, and these, like grafts (as I have said already) they joined and applied to their own tongue.]

Addressing those modern authors who occupy themselves with simply translating classical models, he asks:

> si ces tant fameux aucteurs [i.e. Cicero and Virgil] se fussent amusez à traduyre, eussent-ilz elevé leur langue à l'excellence et hauteur ou nous la voyons maintenant? Ne pensez donques, quelque diligence et industrie que vous puissiez mettre en cest endroit, faire tant que nostre langue encores rampante à terre puisse hausser la teste et s'elever sur piedz [1.7].[37]
>
> [if these authors, so famous, had passed the time with translating, would they have elevated their language to the excellence and loftiness where we see it now? Then do not think, whatever diligence and industry that you can bring to this purpose, to make it possible for our language, still creeping along the ground, to be able to lift its head up and rise up on its feet.]

For the *Ars poetica* to be "rediscovered" by early modern theorists as a rallying cry for a new ethic of translation and as a guarantor of a new sensibility of decorum, it had first to be dislodged from its long residence in the humble Latin grammar curriculum. Medieval school masters, searching for a better way to teach Latin composition, can be said to have given the *Ars poetica* its chance to become a classic of critical theory. Once it had outlived its usefulness they let go of it, and it became the property of humanist and Neoclassical critics, who at once classicized it and universalized it in their national languages. This is the route through which it comes before every modern student reading a history of literary criticism. For its canonical status in the modern tradition, its explanatory assimilation to the history of aesthetics from the humanist period onward, we have ultimately to thank those obscure medieval schoolmasters.

37. Du Bellay, *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoyse*, 89–90.