

In 'Spitting Distance' of Philosophy : Horace *Epist.* 1.1

This paper shows how affective reading lends special insight into Horatian *sermo*, an aporetic poetic project attuned to bodily satisfaction (*satietas*), needs, and impingements. (Braund and Gold 1998) My analysis focuses initially on *Satires* 1 (especially *S.* 1.1-5) and concludes with a detailed study of *Epistles* 1.1. (For *Epist.* as *sermo*, Mayer 1994: 2-3.) The paper steps toward a reparative reading of *sermo*, or at least toward one that is only 'weakly' paranoid (cf. Sedgwick 2003).

It is well known that Horace exploits the association of *sat* and *sat-ura/-ira* in the *sermones*; currently, scholars tend to interpret the poet's discomfort with regard to bodily satiety vis-à-vis his anxiety over literary or political status through intertextual and historicist lenses. (E.g., Freudenburg 2001, Gowers 2012 on Horace's dysentery and wet dream in *S.* 1.5). But '*sat[is]*', unlike other terms suggesting adequacy (e.g., *affatim*), promises an *objective* satisfaction mediated by the body—not the mind. I suggest, therefore, that the poet's consistent ambivalence toward achieving 'gut-level' *sat*-isfaction in the *Satires* and *Epistles* per se constitutes the means and end of *sermo*. The diatribe *S.* 1.1, e.g., ends with the declaration that its Stoic prescriptions on bodily questions (food, sex, shelter) are 'sufficient', 1.1.120 *iam satis est*. This declaration is surely ironic, but the irony does not merely (as is thought) deliver a dry jab to Stoic prolixity. As I suggest, Horace marshals the language of bodily knowing (i.e., *sat*) to indicate a more basic point: cognitive explanations—no matter *which* philosophical school espouses them—always fail to account for embodied experience. Indeed, far from engendering *ataraxia*, cognition typically *increases* anxiety about whether social and other constraints are compatible with consistent bodily satisfaction.

A similar tension between cognitive-philosophical salves and what the body ‘knows’ lies at the heart of *Epistles* 1.1, a poem that identifies bodily health as *the* symptom of psychological well-being (*Epist.* 1.1.33-5; cf. 1.1.106-8). Horace’s emphasis on the orality/aurality of his epistolary project likewise attunes us to the centrality of embodied experience, in this case of reading and listening (1.1.34-5 *voces*; cf. 1.1.8, 1.1.40, *aurem*). Yet to read the poem aloud *with feeling* (e.g., 1.1.62-9) yields provocative results: lines mocking equestrians, whose wealth grants them front-row seats in the theatre compel the reader to project spit while reading aloud (1.1.67, *ut propius spectes lacrumosa poemata Pupii*). Thus, embodied oral performance of the lines transforms the expensive seats into a dubious honor, ostensibly serving the poet’s philosophical point, that passion for wealth is wicked. On the other hand, spitting is also associated with anger, undermining the very equanimity for which the poet strives. I interpret this moment in light of the poem’s concluding lines (1.1.106-8), in which Horace airs, with typical subtlety, an unsettling diffidence regarding cognition’s potential to satisfy embodied experience.

Bibliography

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