

BLIND EYES AND CUT THROATS: AMNESIA AND
SILENCE IN HORACE *SATIRES* 1.7

EMILY GOWERS

There is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place.

—John Dryden, *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*

Let them remember, it is with Wits as with Razors, which are never so apt to cut those they are employ'd on, as when they have lost their edge.

—Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, preface

IN HIS FIRST BOOK OF *SATIRES*, Horace notoriously turns a blind eye to politics.¹ Yet the autobiographical elements that are the alternative focus of the book are often oblique and blurred as well. As a result, when Horace's own history is caught up in an event of universal significance, the Roman Revolution, the meeting of the personal and the political exerts a special fascination for the reader, all the more so for having the character of a blind spot. We find ourselves looking for what Horace has most suppressed in his partial account of his life.² Another writer who lived through a revolution, Vladimir Nabokov, returned to the first draft of his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, only to realize that he had left similar gaps in his narrative of the events leading up to 1917: "I revised many passages and tried to do something about the amnesic defects of the original—blank spots, blurry areas, domains of dimness."³

I would like to thank audiences at Princeton University and the University of Chicago who heard earlier versions of this paper, and also *CP*'s anonymous referees for their very helpful suggestions. Quotations are from Horace *Satires* I, unless otherwise specified (with "S." the abbreviation for "*Satire*" in citations). I have used the Teubner edition of Klingner 1970, with minor changes in orthography; translations are my own.

1. See Kennedy 1992, 31–34, on how Horace replaces political commentary with the language of friendship and personal relations, which, he argues, can nevertheless be seen to have an indirectly political charge.

2. See Seeck 1991, 547, on suspicion as the overriding mode for reading the *Satires*.

3. Nabokov 1966, 12. Sturrock 1993, 239: "the aesthete's response to such vulgar, overnight events as the Bolshevik revolution is to admit them to his story only in miniature, as the source of local memories, peculiar to himself."

For Horace, a kind of textual “amnesia” or blindness affects his recalling of the central trauma of his life and chief stain on his record: his participation on the wrong side at the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C.E. For most of *Satires* I, he barely mentions his disgraced republican past. In *Satire* 6, the “official version” legitimizing Horace’s claim to write satire for Maecenas, the fact that he fought for Brutus and against Octavian is reduced to one sentence about having once had command of a Roman legion.⁴ Yet in that poem, an image of an outstanding body speckled with moles works well as an incarnation of Horatian satire: exceptional, but blemished.⁵ And there have been other steady hints in the course of the book, about warts, carbuncles, branding, court writs, censor’s black marks, and minor peccadilloes.⁶

Matters come to a head in the short *Satire* 7, tucked away in the least conspicuous part of the book, where Horace finally lances the boil of his past and lets the “pus and poison” contained in its opening metaphors come oozing out. Despite its disavowals—that it is about insignificant people, in a faraway place, and stale news anyway—the poem can be read, as I hope to show, as an indirect specimen of autobiography, a memorial to Philippi, the proscriptions, and the Roman Revolution, in so far as they were part of the experience of Horatius Flaccus and left their distinguishing marks on his record to date.⁷ The poem functions as the most concentrated blot on the smooth surface of the book, its *abcès de fixation*. I will focus here on a number of particularly charged words or phrases that have special relevance both to recent history and to Horace’s story. These, I will argue, make Horace the center of his own history, and yet allow him to keep himself anonymous and his response to history deliberately opaque.⁸

On the surface, this satire is neither personal nor political. Horace reports on a vitriolic circuit-court case, in my view almost certainly a fictitious one,⁹ held under Brutus the tyrannicide during his years as proconsul of Asia Minor between the Ides of March and Philippi (43–42 B.C.E., about six years before the publication of the poem). Brutus was in the anomalous position, with Cassius, of having been proscribed and exiled by the triumvirs, but also of having been granted *maius imperium* by the Senate over the Eastern provinces. In addition, he had illegally annexed Asia Minor and was throwing his weight around there. Horace had joined Brutus’ entourage as a student in Athens and was presumably present in his camp in Asia, though there is no mention of this here. *Praetore* (line 18) loosely stands for “proconsul” or “governor,” but it is worth remembering that Brutus had also been *praetor urbanus* in 44, and in that capacity had had the odd task

4. S. 6.47–48: “at olim / quod mihi pareret legio Romana tribuno.” See Henderson 1994, 161 (1998a, 96).

5. S. 6.67: “egregio inpersos . . . corpore naevos.”

6. *Satires* 6.66–67; 3.73–74; 4.5, 4.106; 4.66; 6.20–21; 3.20, 3.140.

7. See now Citroni 2000, focusing on the memory of Philippi in the *Odes* and *Epistles* (*Carm.* 2.7.1–16, 3.4.26, 3.14.27–28, *Epist.* 1.20.23, 2.2.49). He argues (p. 42) that “this great turning-point in history,” in which Horace played such an insignificant part and which looked like a personal fiasco, is repeatedly represented as the “starting-point” of his reinvention as a poet. I discuss the autobiographical elements throughout *Satires* I in a forthcoming paper.

8. Cf. McGinn 2001, 95: “Where is Horace in this poem? The satirist can be found everywhere and nowhere.”

9. Pace DuQuesnay 1984, 37–38.

of putting on sham birthday games for Caesar, even though Caesar was dead and he himself was out of town.¹⁰

The language of the poem makes this court case simultaneously a gladiatorial fight, with Brutus presiding as umpire-impresario. Is Horace staging a kind of posthumous, irreverent funeral games for Brutus?¹¹ The sparring partners are two seedy, marginal characters who shout angry abuse at each other: Rupilius Rex, a victim of the proscriptions from Praeneste (who may or may not be the real-life praetor of 43 B.C.E.),¹² and Persius, a “mongrel” half-Greek businessman. The words *pus atque venenum* (line 1) and *hybrida* (line 2) may be Horace’s own venomous labels for the combatants, but the names also reproduce the flavor of genealogical bad-mouthing.¹³ We are never told what the dispute is about. Persius has the last word: “Why don’t you cut King’s throat, Brutus? After all, that’s your line of business.” And at that point the poem stops, before Brutus can reply.

With its noisome beginning, circumstantial middle (a long heroic digression), and sliced-off ending, the poem seems to be angling for a sour reception, and until recently that is what it got: blank stares or outright hostility. It has been labeled an early mistake, something to fill in a gap in the book, a “nothing,” or what John Dryden famously called “garbage.”¹⁴ In a way, Dryden was right: the poem is a dumping ground for all the poison that needs to be disposed of before Horace can make a new start in *Satires* 8 and 9 in the sunny gardens and pure house of his patron Maecenas.¹⁵ More recently, however, it has been recognized that, even though Horace disowns the poem as something stale and trivial, it is dealing with important unfinished business (cf. *permagna negotia*, 4). Ian DuQuesnay sees it as a vicious but relatively unproblematic hatchet job on the done-for Brutus and his followers.¹⁶ For Egil Kraggerud and John Henderson, Brutus is a riskier figure to deal with, an unsilenceable symbol of liberty, a scapegoat who is also the republican conscience of Rome and who cannot be expunged even with the sharpest satirical language of the new regime.¹⁷ Henderson identifies the poem and Brutus’ paradigmatic dumb stance within it as classical precursors of dissident “silent protest,” of “saying without saying.”¹⁸

10. See Henderson 1994, 149–50 (1998a, 81–82), on Brutus’ attempt to restage Accius’ *Brutus* on this occasion; the event was hijacked by C. Antonius, and *Tereus* substituted. For different accounts of the popular response, see Cic. *Att.* 16.2.1 and 16.5.3 = Shackleton Bailey 1965–70 (hereafter, SB), 410.1 and 412.3; *Phil.* 1.36; App. *B Civ.* 3.23.

11. 19–20: “Rupili et Persi par pugnat, uti non / compositum melius cum Bitho Bacchius”; 21: “magnum spectaculum uterque.” For the assassination of Caesar as a substitute for games, see Plut. *Brut.* 10.3 (Cassius): “From their other praetors they demand gifts and spectacles and gladiatorial combats; but from you, as a debt you owe to your ancestry, they demand the abolition of the tyranny.” For out-of-control gladiatorial killing for spectacle’s sake, cf. Sen. *Ep.* 7.5: “intermissum est spectaculum: interim iugulentur homines, ne nihil agatur.”

12. See Hinard 1985, 512–13, for the evidence.

13. On genealogical bad-mouthing, from Homer to modern American “bastard” and “son of a bitch,” see Adams 1977, 21–28.

14. Fraenkel 1957, 119; Rudd 1966, 65; Bernardi Perini 1975, 1; Dryden [1693]1926, 95.

15. Henderson 1994, 152 (1998a, 83–84). Sunny gardens: “aggere in aprico spatari” (*S.* 8.15); pure house: “domus hac nec purior ulla est” (*S.* 9.49).

16. DuQuesnay 1984.

17. Kraggerud 1979; Henderson 1994 (1998a).

18. Henderson (1994, p. 146, n. 2 [1998a, p. 75, n. 4]) cites Jaworski 1992, 108–15, on the political uses of silence.

All the noise of the court case fails to drown out the larger issues of the Revolution that are stirred up along the way: tyranny, proscription, throat-cutting, silencing, freedom of speech, the law, anger, revenge, and the response of the onlooker.

It is hard for Horace to write a poem about a tyrannicide becoming a tyrant without drawing attention to the new tyrant, Octavian. It is equally hard for him to write a poem that silences Brutus without making it an early contribution to the literature of proscription, which celebrated the famous decapitated heads of the Republic as emblems of lost freedom of speech. There seems to have been a mini-genre under Augustus and the later Empire of poems about Cicero's head that dwelled morbidly on the orator's silenced voice and ripped-out tongue as a form of reproach to those who had survived.¹⁹ Seneca the Elder, for example, describes a private reading of one of these poems, hosted by Messalla and attended by Pollio (both Horace's friends, listed in his subscription list of supporters—a kind of alternative to the proscription lists—at the end of *Satire* 10). One line of Cornelius Severus' lament ("defendus Cicero est Latiaeque silentia linguae") was apparently enough to make Pollio get up and walk out, with the words: "I refuse to listen to a person who thinks that I'm mute" ("ego istum auditurus non sum, cui mutus videor").²⁰ Yet this is the same Pollio who, according to another anecdote, chose to keep quiet when Augustus asked him to write satire, saying: "I remain silent, for it is not easy to write against someone who can proscribe me" ("at ego taceo. non est enim facile in eum scribere qui potest proscribere").²¹

Proscripti, one can hardly avoid noticing, is the first word of Horace's poem. Of this Jasper Griffin writes, "The proscriptions, the horror of the age, receive one word, quite easy-going and stingless."²² True, the adjective turns out to be attached to an insignificant individual, Rupilius Rex, but is it really possible to reconcile this with Cicero's verdict that *proscriptio* was *miserrimum nomen illud*, the most tragic word of all?²³ Six years on, would it have lost its sting? The word signals glaringly not just that the material of the poem is proscription, but that it is going to broach a subject that is itself taboo, the unmentionable blot on Horace and Octavian's past.²⁴ In 43 the triumvirs named over 300 senators and *equites* on a blacklist: they were outlawed, their property was confiscated, and a price was put on their heads, quite literally.²⁵ Cicero, Cassius, and Brutus were among the ones who did lose their heads (accounts of their deaths encompass aided and unaided suicide, stabbing, and throat-slitting, but all three, it seems, were subsequently decapitated). There were stories about Antony's dining while looking at Cicero's head; Octavian is said to have laid Brutus' head at the foot of Caesar's

19. See Richlin 1999.

20. Sen. *Suas.* 6.27.

21. Macrob. *Sat.* 2.4.21. Richlin (1999, 205) discusses both passages in the light of the proscriptions.

22. Griffin 1993, 7.

23. Cic. *Dom.* 43; cited by Henderson (1998b, 15).

24. See Henderson 1994, 148 (1998a, 78).

25. On the proscriptions, see Hinard 1985; Henderson 1998b.

statue.²⁶ Horace and Messalla, on the other hand, were among those (the majority, in fact) who were reprieved and eventually absorbed into the new establishment.²⁷ So this is a poem about proscription written by a survivor.

The next word, *Regis*, is taboo in another way. Horace has reversed the normal order of Rupilius Rex's name to flash before our eyes a familiar spectre from Roman history, that of the outlawed king, the traditional scapegoat of the Republic, in particular Tarquinius Superbus (534–510 B.C.E.), ejected from Rome by Brutus' ancestor L. Iunius Brutus.²⁸ Indeed, the phrase *Proscripti Regis* gives us in advance the justification for Persius' quip that tyrannicide runs in Brutus' family, that he is a chip off the old block. Persius has the upper hand all along, but that name Rex keeps on coming back through the poem, letting Horace take a sideways look at the forbidden concept of *regnum*, from the expulsion of the Tarquins to the dictatorship of Caesar and beyond.²⁹ This is not to mention all the pseudo-“kings” floating about in late republican invective, where the name “king” was passed about from one hubristic citizen to another (Caesar tried to laugh it off, saying, “My name is not Rex but Caesar”).³⁰ Kings in the poem are underdogs who go on rearing their ugly heads and being suppressed; see lines 1 (*Proscripti Regis*), 6 (*vincere Regem*), 25 (*excepto Rege* [king as scapegoat]), and 35 (*Regem iugulas* [king as sacrificial victim]).³¹ Even the misleading signpost in line 9 (*ad Regem redeo*, which looks like a pun on *ad rem redeo* [“I get back to the subject”]) suggests that we are always returning to kings.³² Cicero saw late republican tyranny as a self-replicating hydra: no sooner do you remove one tyrant than another appears to take his place.³³

Tarquin is not the only candidate for the label “proscribed king.” Another one is Cicero, stigmatized as the first *peregrinus rex*—“outsider king”—since Tarquin and Numa, while being glorified as the chief victim among the proscribed.³⁴ Cicero's name is never mentioned in Horace's *Satires*,³⁵ though an allusion in *Satire* 6 to the king Servius Tullius, in the context of humbly-born “kings” (“ante potestatem Tulli, atque ignobile regnum,” 6.9),

26. Cicero: Plut. *Cic.* 48.3–4; App. *B Civ.* 4.19. Cassius: Plut. *Brut.* 43.5–7, *Caes.* 69.3; App. *B Civ.* 4.113; Vell. Pat. 2.70. Brutus: Plut. *Brut.* 52.4–5, *Caes.* 69.8; App. *B Civ.* 4.131. Antony and Cicero: App. *B Civ.* 4.20. Octavian and Brutus: Suet. *Aug.* 13.

27. See Hinard 1985, 473–75, on the evidence for Horace's proscription, based primarily on a scholion to *Epist.* 2.2.41 (“cum aliis proscriptus est”) and possibly supported by allusions to the loss of his property at *Epist.* 2.2.50–51. Whether or not this is convincing, Horace was certainly identified through his participation at Philippi with what Messalla (Plut. *Brut.* 53.1) called “the better and more just side.”

28. Lejay [1911] 1966, ad loc.

29. There are balancing elements of “kingliness” in Persius' name too: the Persian “king of kings” (Henderson 1994, 162 [1998a, 97]; and cf. S. 3.136: “magnorum maxime regum”); *hybrida* (“bastard son of a bitch,” line 2) also hints at tyrannical *hubris* and *superbia* (cf. Soph. *OT* 873: ὕβρις φουτεύει τύραννον); see also Van Rooy 1971, 74–75.

30. Caesar: Suet. *Iul.* 79.2; Dio 44.10.1; App. *B Civ.* 2.108; Cic. *Div.* 2.110. See Dunkle 1967, 157: “the charge of *regnum* is probably as old as the Republic”; Matthews 1973 on Rex puns.

31. Van Rooy 1971, p. 74, n. 24; Bernardi Perini 1975, 13.

32. Henderson 1994, 170 (1998a, 107).

33. Cic. *Att.* 14.4.2 = 368.2 SB; cf. App. *B Civ.* 2.136 (Piso's speech): “These men who talk of having killed a tyrant are already so many tyrants over us in place of one”; Brutus ap. Cic. *Ad Brut.* 25.1: “not the removal of a tyranny but a change of tyrant” (“non sublatam dominationem, sed dominum commutatum”).

34. Cic. *Sull.* 22 “cum Tarquinium et Numam et me tertium peregrinum regem esse dixisti.”

35. Griffin 1993, 5.

might be taken as a coded reference to him. Indeed, Horace's account of early republican history in that poem (6.7–21) reworks his own prehistory with equivalents (or substituted equivalents) of the chief figures in his life: an Etruscan king (Tarquin = Maecenas); a banished banisher of kings (*Laevinum, Valeri genus* [6.12] reminds us of Laevinus' ancestor, P. Valerius Poplicola, here pointedly substituted for his fellow consul, L. Iunius *Brutus*);³⁶ and, conspicuously missing, the hero Horatius Cocles, spurious "one-eyed" ancestor of *Horatius lippus*. Cicero can be said to haunt *Satire 7* because it is his joke that Horace has stolen. At Clodius' trial in 61 B.C.E., Cicero turned on its head the misotyrannic abuse Clodius directed at him, "quousque hunc Regem feremus?" ("How much longer do we have to put up with this king?"), by retorting: "Odd that you should be calling *me* a king when Rex [a dead relative of Clodius] did not name you in his will."³⁷

As far as Horace's own story goes, however, the really important *proscriptus rex* was Brutus himself, the man he once called *rex*, another word for patron.³⁸ Brutus was proscribed as Caesar's assassin in 43, but that year and the next the place where his sought-after head was most visible was on the coins he issued to commemorate the Ides of March.³⁹ He is satirized here (*Satire 7*) for behaving like a virtual king, milking Asia of its wealth, lapping up the flattery due to an Oriental monarch, and being in a position to chop off heads at will. In a poem about naming and the logic of names (cf. *appellat*, 24; *compellans*, 31), the title *Rex* is really being pinned on him, just as *canis* ("dog" or "pariah," 25) is, or *cuculus* (Brutus was the cuckoo in Caesar's nest, 31).⁴⁰ And yet the notion of a proscribed *rex* goes some way towards exonerating the triumvirs. Who was more deserving of proscription and banishment, according to Roman tradition, than a king?

Horace proceeds to write off his courtroom drama as a stale anecdote (7.3):

omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus esse

known to everyone, from barbers to the bleary-eyed

This is his way of playing down the power of *sermo* as inflammatory gossip or eyewitness account. But *notus* ("known") is a pregnant word in the *Satires*, associated with branding, labeling, stigmatizing, and censoring.⁴¹ Is Horace signaling that this is in fact a "notorious," "significant" story, rather than a neutrally "known" one?⁴² His *opinor* (2 "as far as I know," "I guess" —

36. DuQuesnay 1984, 46.

37. Cic. *Att.* 1.16.10 = 16.10 SB: "'Regem appellas' inquam 'cum Rex tui mentionem nullam fecerit?'; ille autem Regis hereditatem spe devorarat."

38. *OLD*, s.v. *rex* 8.

39. See Crawford 1974, 508 and 514–18.

40. Dog: at Plut. *Brut.* 34.4, Brutus replays the expulsion of Tarquin by driving the Cynic philosopher Favonius out of the room calling him ἀπλοκύων ("single dog") and ψευδοκύων ("sham dog"). Cuckoo: After his father's death, Brutus was adopted by his maternal uncle, Q. Servilius Caepio; he was also a virtual son to Caesar (cf. Caesar's last words: καὶ σύ, τέκνον; ["you, too, child?"]).

41. *Notus* / *notare*: cf. *Satires* 2.30 ("quidam notus homo cum exiret fornice"), 3.24 ("dignusque notari"), 4.5 ("multa cum libertate notabant"), 4.106 ("vitiorum quaeque notando"), and 6.14–15 ("notante / iudice quo nosti populo").

42. Or, indeed, that it is pertinent to his own history? Cf. *S.* 5.77, *notos*, used of mountains that were a distinguishing feature of Horace's childhood. Martial's allusions at 6.64.26 and 10.56.6 to barber-surgeons who endeavor to remove the brands (*stigmata*) imprinted by a satirist suggest another possible line of connection

his only intervention in the poem) looks like an authorial nod and a wink. In other words, *et lippis notum* might be working as a kind of oxymoron: this story about a *magnum spectaculum* is known, perceived, even by people who are half-blind.⁴³ Polybius dismisses one of his sources as having as little authority as “barbershop gossip.” So is Horace also telling us that the whole story is a fiction?⁴⁴

The phrase “omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus” is normally brushed aside quickly. Barbershops doubled as pharmacies in the ancient world, and this is given as the usual reason for the rather odd coupling: people with minor ailments would come in to pick up their prescriptions, and stay around to hear the latest gossip.⁴⁵ There is presumably also some link being made between the poisonous discharge of Rupilius’ rhetoric or personality (“Regis Rupili pus atque venenum,” line 1) and the symptoms of conjunctivitis.⁴⁶ But there is more to the eccentric phrase than that. It happens that *lippus* has already appeared several times in *Satires* I, a significant word that helps Horace turn himself into a Socratic ironist (a Greek proverb goes, “In the country of the blind, the bleary-eyed man is king”⁴⁷). In one context he criticizes the kind of people who have blurred vision with regard to their own faults while being eagle-eyed when it comes to those of their friends (3.25–27):

cum tua pervideas oculis mala lippus inunctis,
cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum
quam aut aquila aut serpens Epidaurius?

When you peer with blurry vision at your own mistakes through medicated eyes, why do you scan the vices of your friends as keenly as an eagle or a snake from Epidaurus?

Yet elsewhere he identifies himself as a fellow sufferer. On his journey to Brundisium in *S.* 5, he famously chooses the moment when Maecenas comes into view, charged with big business (“missi magnis de rebus,” 28), in this case the official reconciliation of Octavian and Antony, to smear black cream on his own sore eyes (5.27–31):

huc venturus erat Maecenas optimus atque
Coceius, missi magnis de rebus uterque
legati, aversos soliti componere amicos.
hic oculis ego nigra meis collyria lippus
illinere. interea Maecenas advenit. . . .

(see Donaldson 1984, 57–58 and 68–69 for imitation of Martial in Ben Jonson’s *Poetaster*: “To the reader”: “Or, living, I could stampe / Their foreheads with those deepe, and publike brands, / That the whole company of Barber-Surgeons / Should not take off, with all their art, and playsters”). By contrast at *Mart.* 11.84 an incompetent barber actively covers his client with cuts or *stigmata* (on which see Fitzgerald 2000, 49).

43. Tosi 1991, 152–53. Gossip in barbershops: *Ar. Plut.* 338, *Av.* 1441, *Eup.* 180.

44. Polyb. 3.20.5. Horace parodies the protestation of truth that canonically preceded a factual account: cf. e.g., *Sen. Apocol.* 1.1–3; *Juv.* 4.35: “res vera agitur” (Radermacher 1970, 283; Bernardi Perini 1975, 8; *pace* DuQuesnay 1984, 37–38: “He cannot be accused of malicious invention: every reader knows he was there and that the anecdote has all the authority of an eyewitness account”).

45. Schol. ad loc. *Pliny NH* 35.37.112 lists barbershops among the typical subjects of Piraeicus, a painter of sordid subjects (*rhyparographos*).

46. Henderson 1994, 158 (1998a, 91): “an eyesore looking for a poultice.”

47. Schol. *Il.* 24.192: ἐν τυφλῶν πόλει γλαυρόος βασιλεύει.

Excellent Maecenas and Cocceius were to meet us here, both ambassadors on grave official business, well used to mending quarrels between friends. This is where I smeared black ointment on my bleary eyes. Maecenas showed up in the meantime. . . .⁴⁸

This is an enigmatic moment of solipsism and indifference comparable to Volteius Mena's idle nail-clipping in the shade of the barber's shop in *Epistles* 1.7. Horace draws attention to himself as a subject (*hic . . . ego*) only to write himself out of history. Conjunctivitis, the physical equivalent of turning a blind eye, is almost an over-determined symptom here. It works as a kind of *aegrotat*⁴⁹ for Horace: it stops him from being a political participant or even an observer,⁵⁰ and it signifies that he is not capable of directing the hostile glare of satirical *invidia* at other people. More curiously, his treatment acts as a kind of protective, minor form of self-defacement—like a small, blackening homeopathic remedy against other people's blacker resentment.⁵¹

Lippus is so often connected with words like *notus* and *illinere* in Horace, with sins and black marks, external or self-imposed, as to suggest that whenever the word occurs it may also be a way of saying "Philippi," the blot or stain on Horace's past, without quite saying it.⁵² This may sound improbable, but it can be illustrated with a few examples. Shortly after Horace smears the black cream on his eyes in *Satire* 5, Maecenas invites him to play ball. Horace refuses, with the excuse, "nam *pila lippis* inimicum ludere et crudis" ("for ball games are inimical to people with dyspepsia and bleary eyes," 5.49). The word "Philippi" is virtually encrypted here, in connection with the idea of enmity. Similarly, in his *Epistle* to Augustus (*Epist.* 2.1), a diplomatic entente replacing the original, hostile confrontation between Horace and his addressee, Horace tries to excuse himself from writing a panegyric for Augustus by telling the story of the bad poet Choerilus, whom Alexander the Great paid in coins displaying his father's head: *Philippos* (234). The word in this context is prudently glossed by *regale nomisma* ("a royal minting"), but it inadvertently invokes the primary reason for Horace's reluctance. In the lines immediately following, bad encomiasts who stain their subjects' glorious actions with faulty writing (*linunt*, 237) are pointedly compared to mishandled black ink that leaves stains or blotches ("veluti tractata *notam labemque* remittunt / *atramenta*," 235–36).⁵³

In *Satire* 7, a poem that has been called Horace's "memoria di Filippi,"⁵⁴ a record of his past in which he is ostensibly not involved, there are several

48. With *illinere* and *collyria nigra* compare *Ars P.* 446–47, "incomptis allinet atrum / traverso calamo signum" and *Epist.* 1.19.30, "nec socerum quaerit quam versibus oblinat atris."

49. It is used literally in this sense by Persius at 3.44.

50. Cucchiarelli (forthcoming) notes that the Greek equivalent, γλαυρός, is used by Aristophanes (*Ecll.* 398–402) in connection with political nonparticipation.

51. Oliensis 1998, 28: "[H]istory's witness has sealed his eyes shut. Rather than expose his friend's secrets, the satirist literally defaces himself." Glenn Most points out to me that Horace the purblind satirist makes himself a minor, mundane version of Homer the blind epic poet; I believe this point is also made by Cucchiarelli (forthcoming).

52. Cf. also *S.* 3.25–26: *lippus* adjacent to *mala* and *vitiis*.

53. Cf. *S.* 4.36 *chartis illeverit* (of satirical writing); cf. n. 48 above. The preface to Lambinus (1561) ends with a Latin ditty concerning Horace's enlightenment by the Sabine gypsy (cf. *S.* 9.29–34) about his precarious future. The verses start with *Lippus* and end with *Philippus*.

54. Bernardi Perini 1975, 9.

barely concealed references to the word "Philippi" in the very first few lines. There is, for a start, an unusually heavy distribution of p-sounds in lines 1–4 (*Proscripti . . . Rupili pus . . . / . . . pacto . . . Persius . . . opinor / . . . lippis . . . / Persius . . . permagna*), which then fade out before returning with a vengeance when the protagonists' names are repeated in the central line of the poem, line 19: "Rupili et Persi par pugnat."⁵⁵ *Lippis* in line 3 supplies the remainder of the word. Yet all this only confirms what lies buried (but clearly audible) in the first line of the poem, adding a third taboo word to *Proscripti* and *Regis*: *Rupili pus*.

When *lippus* occurs at *Satire* 3.25, in connection with blindness towards one's own faults, its opposite is *cernere acutum* ("to see keenly"). This suggests that *tonsores*, barbers with cutthroat razors, are paired with *lippi* in *Satire* 7 not just to complete a scenario of city life, but because the two are polar opposites.⁵⁶ The phrase sets up a contrast between blunt and sharp. Barbers would be the first to know a story about a king. In antiquity they always had a special, fraught relationship with royalty; they were close confidants, at the cutting edge of news, but their sharp blades and their uncontrolled gossip made them a source of anxiety too. Ancient Sweeney Todds were not just knife-happy mock-tyrants but also potential tyrannicides. According to various stories, the Sicilian tyrant Dionysius, rather than entrust his throat to a barber, made his daughters shave him, or had his hair singed off with glowing coals or red-hot walnut shells. One day at the barbershop people were talking about what a hard ruler Dionysius was. "Funny you should say that," said the barber, "when I have my razor at his throat every day!" When Dionysius heard this, he crucified the man. A chatty barber once put a towel round King Archelaus' shoulders and asked how he would like him to cut his hair. He replied: "In silence."⁵⁷

Further important contrasts are contained in Horace's phrase about bleary-eyed men and barbers, contrasts that send indirect and contradictory signals to the observers of the piquant incident he describes. First, the phrase suggests alternative ways of being a bystander in a revolution: either one can keep one's head down and turn a blind eye, or one can be sharp, keep ahead with the latest gossip, and be a tactless reminder of the blade next to the throat.⁵⁸ Second, it suggests two different ways of being a satirist: either screening off the truth or getting close to the bone (alternatives that Persius' namesake, the Neronian satirist Persius, weighs up when he plays barber to

55. Cf. the echo of *pus* in line 3: *omnibus . . . tonsoribus*. I am grateful to Joshua Katz for discussing this with me.

56. Beyond Tosi's contrast (1991, 152–53) between "those who can know nothing" and "those who know everything"; cf. Livy 32.34.3: "apparet id . . . etiam caeco."

57. Cic. *Tusc.* 5.59, *Off.* 2.25; Plut. *Mor.* 508–9. The Dionysius anecdote at Cic. *Off.* 2.58 is also discussed, together with Mart. 11.58 and 11.84, by Fitzgerald (2000, 48–50) in the context of masters being at the mercy of their slave barbers. By contrast, an anecdote about the emperor Augustus describes him as so careless about his hair (and personal safety) that he was capable of reading or writing while being shaved and cropped by two barbers at once (Suet. *Aug.* 79.1: "in capite comendo tam incuriosus, ut raptim compluribus simul tonsoribus operam daret ac modo tonderet modo raderet barbam eoque ipso tempore aut legeret aliquid aut etiam scriberet.")

58. For this opposition in a modern interpretation of the Roman Revolution, see the article on M. Tullius Cicero in *OCD*³ (J. P. V. D. Balsdon and M. T. Griffin): "He accepted the overtures of the young Caesar, uncritical of the lawlessness of many of his acts, misled by his youth into a mistaken assessment of his

Nero's King Midas in his first satire).⁵⁹ And third, it signals two ways of reading this poem: one can be blunt or sharp about it; one can either blindly accept its surface subject matter or choose to be acutely aware of how politically sensitive it is. Together, the two groups, *lippi* and *tonsores*, suggest a meeting between impassivity and violence, something like the *tricoteuses* knitting under the guillotine.⁶⁰

Indeed, during later ages of mass execution, the barber's blade took on a special edge in fiction. Dickens in *Little Dorrit* speaks of the guillotine as "the national razor" put back in its case.⁶¹ Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* contains a scene of pungent misunderstanding in which Jos Sedley at the wars urges his valet to shave him, without being aware that he is a Bonapartist sympathizer:

Jos had sunk in a chair—he had torn off his neckcloths, and turned down his collars, and was sitting with both his hands lifted to his throat.

"Coupez-moi, Isidor," shouted he; "vite! Coupez-moi!"

Isidor thought for a moment he had gone mad, and that he wished his valet to cut his throat.⁶²

In Nabokov's short story, *Razor*, a Bolshevik torturer finds himself under the knife of one of his former victims, now a small-town barber:

Ivanov tenderly moved his blade along the cold, rustling cheek.

"We're absolutely alone, comrade. Understand? One little slip of the razor, and right away there will be a good deal of blood. Here is where the carotid throbs. So there will be a good deal, even a great deal of blood. But first I want your face decently shaved, and, besides, I have something to recount to you."

Cautiously, with two fingers, Ivanov lifted the fleshy tip of the man's nose and, with the same tenderness, began shaving above the upper lip.⁶³

There is plenty of reason, then, to mention cutthroat barbers in a poem that ends with a tyrannicide being tempted to put a knife to someone's throat

political *acumen*, and he *closed his eyes* [my italics] to the fact that Octavian could never be reconciled to Brutus and Cassius." Cic. *Planc.* 66 is more sanguine about the Roman people's vision, sharper at least than their hearing: "nam posteaquam sensi populo Romano aures hebetiores, oculos autem esse acres atque acutos"; cf. Hor. *S.* 3.29–30: "acutis / naribus horum hominum." The anecdote about Augustus' reaction to the statue of Brutus put up by his Gaulish admirers, as told in Plut. *Brut. sync.* 5, records a set of contrasting responses to a tense situation (partly mirrored in Horace's poem): Augustus at first "walked past" (παρῆλθεν); then he frowned; the burghers "looked aside" at each other (εἰς ἀλλήλους ἀπέβλεψαν), then fell silent; finally Augustus smiled.

59. Pers. 1.119–21: "me muttire nefas? nec clam, nec cum scrobe?" nusquam / 'hic tamen infodiam. vidi, vide ipse, libelle / auriculas asini quis non habet?" Aristius Fuscus' teasing reaction at *S.* 9.66 "ridens dissimulare" exemplifies the tone of Horatian satire; Rudd 1973, ad loc. translates: "smilingly turned a blind eye."

60. For an apothecary's shop as a setting for assisted suicide, see the anecdote at App. *B Civ.* 2.64: the small town of Gomphi, in Thessaly, was stormed by Caesar just before Pharsalia; twenty of its elders were discovered dead at the apothecary's, surrounded by goblets, as though they were drunk, but with one man seated in a chair, like a doctor, who had obviously been handing out poison to them.

61. Dickens 1857, chap. 1.

62. Thackeray 1847, chap. 32; see Robbins 1993, 139–44 (also cited by Fitzgerald 2000, 49) for further examples.

63. Nabokov 1995, 179–82. I am grateful to Mark Buchan for pointing me to this story.

and to exercise a tyrant's prerogative for violence.⁶⁴ In legend the two Brutuses, the king banisher and the tyrannicide, whose shared name is a synonym for "blunt," "insensible," "blind," and "dumb,"⁶⁵ attract these same oppositions.⁶⁶ Juvenal speaks of the first Brutus' paradoxical *acumen*.⁶⁷ Plutarch and Valerius Maximus both tell a story about how Porcia, wife of the second Brutus, slashed herself with a razor on the eve of the Ides of March to prove her fortitude and was reprimanded by her husband, with obvious dramatic irony, for trying to do a barber's job.⁶⁸ In Horace's poem the *lippi et tonsores* start us thinking about Brutus as a literally oxymoronic combination: a sword-wielding assassin who is obtuse and preprogrammed, a killer who cannot cut his way out. There is also the contrast with his unnamed opposite number, Caesar, literally "the cutter."

The barber's razor is the first of several sharp edges buried in this poem. An executioner's axe and a vine dresser's scythe are to follow; even anger is described as *capitalis*,⁶⁹ and words like *amari* (7), *acres* (21), and *aceto* (32) evoke sharp flavors on the tongue. At lines 26–27, Persius' speech is compared in a "Homeric" simile to a flooded river in a place "where the axe is seldom borne" (*quo rara securis*, 27—a strange detail), presumably in some faraway wooded ravine. On the surface, this view of uncontrolled speech is negative, but *rara securis* also looks like an allusion to the executioner's axe, nearer to home, that cut off Republican invective forever.⁷⁰ Similarly, the robust vine-cutter, "undefeated" (*invictus*) by abuse from a passer-by, preserves what Horace later calls the *vestigia ruris*, traces of old Italian satire and resistance.⁷¹

The climax of all these knives is the throat-slitting blade of *iugulas* (35). Yet at first sight the idea of throat slitting does not appear to be appropriate either for the Ides of March (alluded to in Persius' quip) or for judicial execution. Appian relates how Caesar's assassins *tried* to slit his throat, but the knife slipped and he was stabbed in twenty-three other parts of his body (with the conspirators of course ending up stabbing each other as well).⁷² Perhaps this is a way of saying that slitting Caesar's throat would have been the most predictable or appropriate way of killing so capital a calf, but things turned out otherwise. Normally, slitting the throat was a humiliating kind of punishment reserved for condemned gladiators and sacrificial animals.⁷³ In that sense it is the culmination of all the metaphors in the poem

64. Henderson 1994, 148, cites the two classic parables of tyrants cutting their subjects down to size: Thrasylbulus and Periander and the corn at Hdt. 5.92; and Tarquin cutting down poppy/lily-heads at Livy 1.54.6–10 and Ov. *Fast.* 2.701–10.

65. *OLD*, s.v. *brutus*: paired with *hebes* (Sen. *Ben.* 3.37.4), *stultus* (Postumius Albinus *historia* 2), *caecus* (Pac. *trag.* 366), *elinguis* (Pac. *trag.* 176).

66. See especially Henderson 1994, p. 150 and n. 15 (1998a, p. 82 and n. 16).

67. Juv. 4.102–3: "quis priscum illud miratur acumen, / Brute, tuum? facile est barbato imponere regi [Tarquin]" (cited by Henderson 1994, 149 [1998a, 81]).

68. Plut. *Brut.* 13; Val. Max. 3.2.15.

69. *Divideret* in the same line suggests a "severing" metaphor, too: cf. S. 1.99–100: "at hunc liberta securi / divisit medium." The proscriptions made the triumvirs understudies for the *tresviri capitales*, the board responsible for public executions.

70. Cf. Schlegel 1999, 348. For *securis* as a metaphorical "deathblow" see *OLD*, s.v. 2a.

71. *Epist.* 2.1.160.

72. App. *B Civ.* 2.117.

73. *OLD*, s.v. *iugulo* 1.

that set Brutus up as the umpire presiding over a gladiatorial bout, or as a *rex sacrorum*. At the center of the poem, when Horace satirizes the shameful deal struck by Glaucus and Diomedes, the word *missus* in the phrase *muneribus missis* (18) has traces of its sense as the technical opposite of *iugulatus*. According to one inscription, the crowd in the arena shouted either *missos, missos*, "let them go"; or *iugula, iugula*, "slit their throats."⁷⁴

However, there is also reason to think that *iugulare* is especially linked with proscription. This is François Hinard's view, in his discussion of the triumphal proscriptions: *iugulare* and *proscribere* were virtually synonymous.⁷⁵ The equivalence is made clear in a passage from Cicero: "You slit my father's throat, *even though* he was not proscribed." Similarly, Appian writes: "It was evident that a corpse was not one of the proscribed *if the head was still attached*."⁷⁶ How much throat slitting and decapitation were really regarded as equivalent is not clear: only a few of Hinard's proscribed victims are listed as being *iugulati* as opposed to executed, even if the end product, the severed head, was the same. After closer investigation of the word, Jean-Louis Voisin concludes that *iugulare* sometimes meant "throat slitting" as distinct from decapitation, and sometimes covered the whole process.⁷⁷ The precedent had been set by Sulla (*iugulari iussit*), who in 82 B.C.E. offered a reward for each scalp collected.⁷⁸ Henderson claims that Brutus is being invited to kill Rex "as if he were (a) Caesar rather than the victim of Caesarism."⁷⁹ However, in the light of this connection between *iugulare* and *proscribere*, it looks as though Brutus is being invited to kill Rex *like a proscribed citizen* rather than like a Caesar—at a time when Brutus is proscribed, under sentence, himself.

There is another reason for using *iugulare* here. Metaphorically it means "to attack a vulnerable point"—in a legal context, "to nail," or "to convict."⁸⁰ In Cicero's account of his own palpable hit at Clodius' trial, a string of gladiatorial/sacrificial metaphors—swords of lead, lenient coaches, exposed throats (*plumbeo gladio iugulatum iri, uti lanista clemens, aperte iugula sua pro meo capite P. Clodio ostentarint*)—build up to the final (and to us somewhat leaden) Rex pun and the silencing and collapse of the victim (*conticuit et concidit*).⁸¹ Clodius is slaughtered with his own joke, in a grim foreshadowing of his real death (according to one account, his throat was slit in a fight with Milo).⁸² The Latin equivalent of "hoist with one's

74. Dessau, *ILS* 5134: "missos missos iugula iugula."

75. Hinard 1985, 41: "La mise à mort des pros crits nous est toujours présentée comme un égorgement au point que *iugulare* a pu servir de substitut de *proscribere*."

76. Cic. *Rosc. Am.* 32: "patrem meum, cum proscriptus non esset, iugulastis"; App. *B Civ.* 4.15.

77. Voisin 1984, 246.

78. Sall. *Cat.* 51.32.

79. Henderson 1994, 163 (1998a, 99).

80. *OLD*, s.v. *iugulo*. E.g., Cic. *Phil.* 13.38: "quo facilius reviviscat Pompeianorum causa totiens iugulata," *Clu.* 68: "cum Oppianicum iam . . . duobus iugulatum praediiciis videret," *Pis.* 5: "tela . . . intenta iugulis civitatis"; as a technical legal term, see Mazurek 1997.

81. Cic. *Att.* 1.16.2, 3, 4, 10 = 16 SB.

82. Vell. Pat. 2.47.4: "Clodius a Milone . . . ex occurso rixa iugulatus est."

own petard" can be found in Terence's *suo sibi gladio hunc iugulo* ("I foil him with his own sword," *Ad.* 957).

In Horace's poem it is really Brutus who is *iugulatus* (touché) by the final pun. But it is not just that an excruciating joke works as a conversation stopper.⁸³ Even more specifically, *iugulare* can be used as a metaphor for dumbfounding someone with a joke at his own expense. This is how the word appears in Terence's *Eunuch*, in a scene concerning sycophancy towards royalty that is known to have interesting intertextual relations with Horace's *Satires* in other ways, but is not usually discussed with reference to this particular point.⁸⁴ The scene features a *miles gloriosus*, Thraso, who is smug about the special place he has with the king and cannot resist relaying a joke he made about the royal elephant keeper: "Are you so fierce because you have *imperium* over wild beasts?" An unctuous parasite, Gnatho, congratulates him with the words, *papae iugularas hominem* ("You really had the man there," "You really got him by the throat"). He goes on to ask, "So what was his response?" The soldier replies: *mutus ilico* ("It left him speechless").⁸⁵ Without having to say it, Horace sets up the same conclusion: Brutus lives up to the omens in his name and all the anecdotes that grew up around him (a silent arbiter, an orator of few words, a mute conspirator⁸⁶) and is struck dumb. In other words, there turns out to be a deep connection between the verbal content of the joke and its devastating effect: a joke about the word *iugulare* slits the throat of its recipient and makes a "dumb man" dumber.

And that is where the poem ends. Like many of the *Satires* it stops unexpectedly short; in this case the prematurely cut-off ending has a special formal relationship with that word *iugulas*. Horace uses the image of a knife at the throat twice elsewhere in the *Satires*: once in *Satire* 3 to describe a captive audience made to listen to *amaras historias* ("bitter histories") *porrecto iugulo* ("with their throats laid bare"), like the audience here with the nasty taste of Republican invective in their mouths; and once to describe being left in the lurch, *sub cultro* ("under the knife"), as Horace is by a foul friend when stuck with the pest in *Satire* 9.⁸⁷ Here he exercises his prerogative as a poet, particularly a preemptively brief, Callimachean kind of poet, to slice off the poem's ending, in barber-satirist or kingly fashion.⁸⁸ One can

83. Schlegel 1994, 20; 1999, 348.

84. The phrase *perpaucorum hominum* at Ter. *Eun.* 409 is alluded to at Hor. *S.* 9.44. See also Skutsch 1985, 450 on the links between Enn. *Ann.* 268 Sk. (a description of how to be a good friend to a great man) and Ter. *Eun.* 401–10 (the dysfunctional antithesis of this); also on 453 *saepe libenter* for a direct verbal link between Ennius and Hor. *S.* 3.63.

85. Ter. *Eun.* 410–17.

86. See Boes 1981. Brutus as "dumb": Plut. *Brut.* 46 for Brutus' refusal to pronounce a verdict on an actor and a clown who were making abusive jokes taken as consent to their execution; *ibid.* 16 for his reticence before the assassination of Caesar ("Brutus said nothing"), *ibid.* 2, for his laconic style of oratory, *ibid.* 2, for the terseness of his letters in Greek (with Clarke 1981, 26); cf. Cic. *Att.* 16.7 = 415 SB: "nam Brutus noster silet."

87. *Satires* 3.88–89, 9.74; the word *iugulare* is also used of Furius' sledgehammer epic technique at *S.* 10.36 ("turgidus Alpinus iugulat dum Memnona").

88. Cf. *S.* 3.122–23 on kings exercising the right to punish: "et magnis parva mineris / falce recisurum simili te, si tibi regnum / permittant homines."

compare his account of a modern poet's self-pruning techniques at 10.69–71 (a vicious parody of a civilized toilette):⁸⁹

detereret sibi multa, recideret omne quod ultra
perfectum traheretur, et in versu faciendo
saepe caput scaberet vivos et roderet unguis.

He'd scrape his stuff right down, and cut away what overran the limits of perfection,
and, when he wrote his verse, he'd tend to scratch his head and bite his nails down to
the quick.

With its unexpectedly sliced-off ending, *Satire 7* anticipates those questionably finished imperial poems (like Ovid's *Fasti* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*) in which voicelessness or decapitated heads also speak of proscription and triumviral silencing.⁹⁰ For all its noise and anger, this satire is a classically repressed record of the revolution: muted, blunted, truncated. As for its reception by the people who might have been offended by it, all we know is that the poem survived and so did Horace, even if at the expense of his integrity (Brutus' tragic impasse is that of Hector and Achilles, whereas Horace seems to identify with the despicable, compromising cowards Glaucus and Diomedes).⁹¹ But the poem can hardly be described as a "poultice" to cover up an open wound:⁹² the pun puts salt and vinegar into the wound, and it is hard for Horace to mention Brutus' Achilles heel and not draw attention to Octavian's as well.⁹³

However, as far as he himself is concerned, Horace is *missus*, "let off": he can shelve the whole business, cut to the next poem. Horace leaves Brutus, Rex, and the jury under the knife and escapes, reprieved, on an upward path to the miraculous salvation summed up at the end of *Satire 9*: "sic me servavit Apollo" ("this is how Apollo saved me"),⁹⁴ and again at the end of

89. Cf. *Ars P.* 447–48: "ambitiosa recidet / ornamenta." Persius' description of Brutus as someone "qui reges consueris tollere" (*S.* 7.34) is reminiscent of Horace's critical comment on Lucilius at *S.* 4.11: "erat quod tollere velles" ("there was stuff you'd want to take away"). For *tollere* as a notoriously ambivalent word ("to remove," i.e. a euphemism for "to kill"; also, "to raise to heaven, to extol": *OLD*, s.v. 5c), cf. Cicero's quip about Octavian (*Fam.* 11.20.1): "laudandum adulescentulum, ornamandum, tollendum" ("extolled" or "removed"), with Vell. Pat. 2.62.2: "cum aliud diceret, aliud intellegi vellet"; cf. also Suet. *Ner.* 39: "quis negat Aeneae magna de stirpe Neronem? / sustulit hic matrem, sustulit ille patrem." On Cicero's pun see Bennett 1935, 201. The potential ambivalence at the end of *S.* 7 is anticipated at 23 (*laudat* ... *laudat*).

90. See Feeney 1992, esp. 10–11 on *Ov. Fast.* 2.685–852, and 19 on the *Fasti's* failure to reach its goal as "a mute reproach to the constraints set upon the poet's speech."

91. Citroni 2000, 35: "Speaking frankly meant recognizing that the regime showed a comprehensive tolerance towards differing political opinions . . . Keeping quiet, on the other hand, carried implications that the regime was tyrannical in character."

92. Seck 1991, 543: "Trostpflaster."

93. App. *B Civ.* 4.51: one Publius, a victim of the proscriptions who was later befriended by Augustus, was praised by him for displaying *imagines* (εἰκόνες) of Brutus in his house. This story might be the fag end of a typical "wit and wisdom of Augustus" anecdote ("Nice set of scalps you've got there, here, claim your reward"; cf. Val. Max. 3.1.2b: Sulla displayed the heads of the proscribed in his atrium) or else genuine diplomacy. In either case, it suggests Augustus' willingness to meet the friends of Brutus more than halfway. Cf. Plut. *Brut. sync.* 5 for the story of the Gauls who were allowed to keep their statue of Brutus; *Brut.* 53.1 for Octavian's mercy towards Strato, who assisted Brutus' suicide; *Cic.* 49.3 for his unexpected praise of Cicero.

94. Besides being a quotation from Hom. *Il.* 22.443 (via Lucil. 231–32 M), could the phrase also have been used by Octavian (who vowed the temple of Apollo Palatinus after his victory over Sextus Pompeius at Naulochus in 36 B.C.E.)?

Satire 2.1: “tu missus abibis” (“you will be let off the hook”). Brutus, by contrast, is supposed to have recognized that he was a loser. At his birthday party before Philippi, he quoted Patroclus’ words to Hector: “But I am destroyed by cruel fate and the son of Leto, Apollo”; and “Apollo” was his password at the fateful last battle.⁹⁵

Satire 8 opens among the wreckage with the image of a tree trunk, the original material from which a speaking statue of Priapus was fashioned:

Olim truncus eram ficulnus. . . .

Once I was a fig-tree stump. . . .

In this persona Horace reinvents himself as caretaker of the new pleasure gardens built by Maecenas over the scattered bones and miserable tombstones of an old Esquiline cemetery. But the opening word *Olim* (later echoed at 8 [*prius*], and contrasted with 14 [*nunc*]) also glances backwards to the Republican past pictured in *Satire* 7 and to the battlefields of the Civil War. That is because the next word, *truncus*, though commentators have not thought it worth pointing out, has another common meaning: “a body without a head.”⁹⁶ Taking the word in that sense for a split second would allow the opening sentence to be read as a run-on from the last poem, making it a direct consequence of the throat-slitting proposed at the end of *Satire* 7. Horace kept his head while all around were losing theirs, but now he momentarily assimilates his own fate to the ultimate catastrophe of the proscriptions—the truncated bodies of Brutus, Cassius, Cicero, and many more—before recording his snap transformation from “dead wood” into a statue of Priapus, a minor god, and scarecrow for the new regime (*S.* 8.1–3).⁹⁷

Olim truncus eram ficulnus, inutile lignum,
cum faber, incertus scamnum faceretne Priapum,
maluit esse deum. deus inde ego . . .

Once I was a fig-tree stump, good-for-nothing timber. Then a craftsman, unsure what to fashion, whether pedestal or sex god, plumped for god. So god’s what I became . . .

By dwelling on a moment of imagined metamorphosis when a headless trunk becomes a divine statue, Horace replays the autobiographical crisis that has already been suggested in another way through the juxtaposition of *Satire*

95. Plut. *Brut.* 24.4–5; App. *B Civ.* 4.134. The tutelage of Apollo was from that point onwards taken over by Octavian: see Gurval 1995, 87–136.

96. For the association of *obtruncare* with the proscriptions see Voisin 1984, 246–47. On truncation in Latin literature see Most 1992, 395–97. Horace’s pliancy is suggested by *ficulnus* (fig wood is proverbially soft: Lejay [1911] 1966, ad loc.).

97. The new statue of Priapus has emerged from his rough outer coating much as the boy Horace, fashioned by his father (*formabat puerum*, *S.* 4.121), emerges from his shell. The father’s phrase at *S.* 4.119–20, “simul ac duraverit aetas / membra animumque tuum, nabis sine cortice” (“as soon as time has firmed you up in mind and limbs, you’ll swim without your water wings”), reminds us that *cortex*, here primarily “a cork float,” also meant “the outer bark of a tree”; this point is also made by Habash 1999, 287. Horace, reincarnated as Priapus, has been transported from the backwoods (*quo rara securis*, *S.* 7.27) to the civilized parks of modern Rome. For Priapus as “Horace,” in an autobiographical or programmatic sense, see Anderson 1982, 80–83; Richlin 1992, 66; Henderson 1999, 188; Habash 1999. The contrast between *Olim* (*S.* 8.1) and *nunc* (*S.* 8.14) (cf. *prius*, 8.8) is anticipated in a franker version of Horace’s past and present at *S.* 6.47–48: “nunc, quia sim tibi, Maecenas, convictor, at olim, / quod mihi pareret legio Romana tribuno.”

7's knife-edge impasse with *Satire* 8's serendipitous new beginning.⁹⁸ In the cut from one poem to the next, Horace's satirical voice is briefly truncated, then salvaged and restored, and that is his protest against muteness.

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98. There is an element of *paraprosdokian* here. A statue in a neglected place might more reasonably claim: "I used to be a god, but now I am a trunk [i.e., "decapitated body"]." For a beheaded tree born again after Philippi, cf. Pliny *NH* 16.133: "memoratur hoc idem factum et Philippis salice procidua atque detrun-cata." I discuss in a forthcoming paper the transitions between satires as an autobiographical device.

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