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Pueri ludentes: Some Aspects of Play and Seriousness in Horace's Epistles

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IN ODE 3.4 HORACE portrays himself as a sacred poet, beloved of the Muses. Even as a child, he was protected miraculously from harm: 11–13 *ludo fatigatumque somno / fronde nova puerum palumbes / texere*. Although the description is fanciful, as with the Wolf of Ode 1.22, Horace may feel, seriously enough, that he bears a charmed life. He is also building up his poetic credentials as *Musarum sacerdos* (3.1.3) so that he may address the Princeps in a high Pindaric mode. It is a new beginning for them both. For “high Caesar,” returning from the wars, is *Pierio recreatus antro*, refreshed and renewed, or perhaps refashioned, by the Muses who love gentle counsel (3.4.40–42). And Horace, weary of struggling with high epic subjects and with the tragic implications of recent Roman history, gets a second wind, a sense of spiritual renewal, halfway through the Roman Odes, and is enabled to pursue their moral and political vision to the end. Initially, he dedicated these odes to the as yet uncorrupted young: 3.1.4 *virginibus puerisque canto*. Now it is the happy, poetically embellished image of himself as a child at play that gives him new resolution and new strength.¹

¹ For Horace’s “authentication” of his art, to support and justify this *longum melos* (Ode 3.4.3), see Davis 98–107, especially 101–2. There may be an implied play on *libertas* (cf. Anderson 163–64): the Child is father to the Man who, still under the Muses’ protection, may address a “king” with vatic/Pindaric authority. In the larger poetic structure of Odes 3.1–6, Horace’s renewal of spirit reverses the weariness and escape into *recusatio* that ends 3.3 (whose last word is *parvis*). Although Caesar’s “re-creation” must remain ambiguous (entertained and refreshed? refashioned into a better political image, with the poets’ help? transformed, with the poets’ help, into a new being, wiser and more humane than before? or a mix of all three?), the parallel between Caesar’s re-creation and Horace’s is significant. Without that sense of rebirth and renewal (threatened though it is, especially in 3.6) there would be no Roman Odes.

The child at play—*puer ludens, puella ludens*—turns up four times in Horace's *Epistles* against the dark background of aging, weariness, and disillusionment. I want, in this essay, to make a distinction between games and play: between what we might call "the poets' game," with all its implications of literary competition and social involvement, from which Horace announces, more than once, that he is retiring, and the creative, spontaneous play that empowers his poetry-writing in the first place. An aging poet may tire of games, but never of play: which is why Horace's protests of resignation, of acceptance of the immutable proprieties of time and change, so easily reverse themselves into bright bursts of indecorous creativity.

1. RETIRING FROM THE GAME

In *Epistle* 1.1, Horace announces his retirement from public life, and especially from poetry-writing, to devote himself to the study of philosophy (*Ep.* 1.1.1–4, 10–12):

Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende Camena,
spectatum satis et donatum iam rude quaeris,
Maecenas, iterum antiquo me includere ludo.
non eadem est aetas, non mens.
.....
nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono;
quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum;
condo et compono quae mox depromere possim.

It is a matter of age, and need. Horace is no longer fit for the "old game" to which Maecenas reinvents him, the game of writing (lyric) poetry, together with the social obligations that this entails.² In one sense, of course, Horace is being ironic when he classifies poetry-writing (*versus*) together with other "frivolities" (*ludicra*, like drinking-parties and lovemaking?), for the phrase combines the Roman philistine's contempt for poetry with the ironic Helle-

² Horace often depicts aging as loss in the *Epistles*: cf. *Ep.* 1.7.25–28, 1.14.32–36 (ending, *nec luisse pudet, sed non incidere ludum*), and 2.2.55–57. He asks us indirectly in *Ep.* 1.1 to take his pain, confusion, and need for philosophical reflection and healing seriously, and a few scholars have obliged, notably La Penna 178–86, who speaks of Horace's unease, irritation, and *senso di delusione* (disillusionment/disappointment) in regard to his past life, and Johnson 1–53. The phrase, *antiquo me includere ludo*, suggests (a) how the self (*me*) is "elided" within the game, and (b), by the sound-play of *includere ludo*, how silly the "old game" can become: like a tired joke. For the rich connotations of *ludus poeticus*, see Wagenvoort. *Ludere* can mean to play, jest, or enjoy the delights of love, but also "to train," as in a gladiatorial or military school. Thus, "thinking of the *ludus poeticus* reminds the poet of the *ludus gladiatorius*" (Wagenvoort 39), and, I would add, of the difficulty and risk associated with the poet's task.

nistic *topos* that describes inferior genres such as lyric or elegiac poetry, or indeed satire, as elegant “trifling.”³ We are well aware that poetry-writing is neither a casual nor an easy game; that, as Horace puts it later, the skilled poet, like the ballet dancer, “will give the appearance of one playing, and will feel torture” (*Ep.* 2.2.124 *ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur*). We are also aware that the *Epistles* are themselves poetry, and skilled poetry at that. In another sense, however, Horace is dead serious. Compared to an aging man’s need to study philosophy, to learn what is “true and fitting” (*verum atque decens*), to get his thoughts together in preparation for death, even the writing of lyric poems—and with them, the whole literary and social scene—may well have seemed an invasive but also evasive game, a distraction from the real business of life. Had Horace only been playing, all this time?

The games from which Horace needs to retire now are glossed further in the framing *Epistles* 1.18 and 1.19, and then in *Epistle* 2.2. In *Ep.* 1.19, a poem about poetic independence and creativity within a tradition, Horace attributes the unfavorable public reception of his *Odes* to his refusal to enter into the literary politics of the day, which would mean performing in public, canvassing for popular appeal and the favor of professional critics and lecturers.⁴ Attacked for what seems his imperial exclusiveness, he cannot even use the old defensive irony: 48–49 *ludus enim genuit trepidum certamen et iram, / ira*

³ On the generic scale lyric poetry ranks lower than epic and tragedy, and private lyrics rank below public ones: hence Catullus’ deprecatory thanks to Nepos (1.4 *meas esse aliquid putare nugas*) and Horace’s wish in *Ode* 1.32 to rise above earlier play (2 *lusimus*), or better, to move between the private and public worlds, as Alcaeus had done before him. Satire, too, is a self-consciously and often self-ironically lower genre: cf. Lucilius’ *ludo ac sermonibus nostris* (982–83M, a hendiadys of sorts), and Horace’s *inludo chartis* (S. 1.4.139) and *haec ego ludo* (S. 1.10.37); also *nescio quid meditans nugarum* (S. 1.9.2). Like the Callimachean *recusatio*, these ironic disclaimers derive from Hellenistic tradition and draw the reader’s attention to the literary game being played, whether Neoteric or (pre-)Augustan. Brink’s comment (169) on S. 1.10 is apposite: “In this satire the attitude of non-committal poetic play seems to clash strangely with the high standards and the strenuous workmanship demanded with so much conviction.”

⁴ The meaning of lines 39–40 (*non ego, nobilium scriptorum auditor et ultor, / grammaticas ambire tribus et pulpita dignor*) is disputed. Fraenkel (349) took it as “pupil and rescuer” of the great Greek poets; Kilpatrick (21), more plausibly, as listener and reader “in the intimate recitations of Maecenas’ friends.” Perhaps so (and there may be some ambiguity here), but the parallel syntax of 37–38 and 39–40 suggests a twofold rejection, of the uneducated mob and the overeducated professor-critics; cf. S. 1.10.37–39 earlier. As Macleod (1977: 373) says, “Horace is . . . sarcastically denying any interest in the follies of contemporary recitations.” Otherwise, as at *Ep.* 2.2.91–103, “Horace here would be listening to others reading their own works and getting his own back by reading his in return” (cf. *Juv. Sat.* 1.1).

truces inimicitias et funebre bellum. The competitive game that poets usually play escalates all too quickly into personal hostility and warfare, the “gladiatorial contest” from which Horace retires so decisively and programmatically in *Epistle* 1.1.⁵

In a different way, *Epistle* 1.18 shows poetry-writing subordinated, necessarily and perhaps rightly, to its social context. Horace is telling young Lollius what obligations he must undertake if he intends to “cultivate a powerful friend” (86)—a list that, in the end, reinforces Horace’s advice, and his own personal resolution, to cultivate detachment through the study of philosophy. In the central section (39–66), the demands come close to home. You shouldn’t write poems, says Horace, when the great man wants to hunt. Better to give in: 47 *surge et inhumanae senium depone Camenae*. Hunting is good, manly exercise, suitable to one who possesses health, strength, and warlike skills, and who also likes to play. Remember how you, your brother, and the *pueri* played “Battle of Actium” on the pond? So go along now: 65–66 *consentire suis studiis qui crediderit te, / fautor utroque tuum laudabit pollice ludum*. The implications are painful. Not only do people scoff at poetry-writing as anti-social and tedious (*inhumanae Camenae*), but it seems to be just another game that people play, “your little game,” like hunting or mock-warfare. And yet, if the *pueri* who play “Actium” are children (as I suspect) and not slaves, Lollius and his brother may be enjoying an imaginative return to childhood, what Romans call *repuerascere*, that may be akin, after all, to the creative play from which poetry springs.

Again, in *Epistle* 2.2, Horace defends his retirement. His mind and temper have aged, along with his body. He looks back bemusedly at the rash confidence, the ambition to get ahead, that motivated his earlier writing. And now his poetic gift itself threatens to fall away, together with other games, notably lovemaking, that require youthful energy and zest (55–57):

singula de nobis anni praedantur euntes;
eripuerit iocos, Venerem, convivia, ludum;
tendunt extorquere poemata; quid faciam vis?

Besides (he continues), the difficulties, the obstacles to poetry-writing—to good poetry-writing, that is—seem greater than ever. All those different readers, with their conflicting preferences and demands; all the busyness of social

⁵ Dilke 106 discusses the many parallels between *Epistles* 1.1 and 1.19 in the ring-composition of *Epistles* 1: address to Maecenas, *Camena*, refusal to court public opinion, metaphors from gladiatorial fights and wrestling, and the prominence of *ludus*; cf. *ludo*, *ludicra* (1.1.3, 10) with *diludia*, *ludus* (1.19.47–48). The two poems were probably written close together, as Prologue and (First) Epilogue of *Epistles* 1.

life at Rome; all those obligatory meetings of the PMAS, the Poets' Mutual Admiration Society, where you display your writings and yourself to best advantage in the recitation hall echoing with the gladiatorial clash of compliments: all this illustrates the "old game" that Horace earlier professed to avoid, but in which he seems to have become more involved than ever.⁶ By contrast, writing good poetry is described as a serious task requiring quiet, concentration, and magisterial "censorship" of words, one's own not least, in the service of an ever-self-renewing language and culture. In sum: the poet "will give the appearance of one playing"—like the ballet dancer—"and will be tortured": 124 *ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur*. Wouldn't it be better, Horace asks—sarcastically, but also with a flash of desperate seriousness—to be self-deceived like the Argive in the story, the harmless loony who watched imaginary plays in an empty theater? Isn't solipsism, or schizophrenia, the easier way?

Horace concludes the first half of *Epistle* 2.2 with a bitterly ironic, yet deadly serious restatement of his resolution to retire from poetry-writing and study philosophy (141–44):

nimirum sapere est abiectis utile nugis,
et tempestivum pueris concedere ludum,
ac non verba sequi fidibus modulanda Latinis,
sed verae numerosque modosque ediscere vitae.

Bitterly ironic because, as he has just argued, writing good poetry is anything but a trivial pursuit. But deadly serious, too, because Horace is deeply weary of the "poets' game" as it is played in Rome, and because the weariness and disillusionment that time and experience bring have driven him back to the study of philosophy that he began at Athens so many years before. And philosophy, as he now describes it, is most centrally the art of living well from day to day; of enjoying life's gifts while you have them, and using them well; and of accepting Nature's high impersonal laws in preparation for that final retirement which is death (213–16):

vivere si recte nescis, decede peritis.
lusisti satis, edisti satis atque bibisti:
tempus abire tibi est, ne potum largius aequo
rideat et pulset lasciva decentius aetas.

⁶ Horace has evidently been taking some part in the poets' game of public readings and (un)critical responses to these: cf. *Ep.* 2.2.102–5 (*multa fero*: what he has been enduring heretofore, and will gratefully retire from now), as against earlier professions of disinvolvement, especially *S.* 1.10.37–39 and *Ep.* 1.19.37–41.

These lines recall *Natura* in Lucretius' Book 3, rebuking the old man who is unwilling to die (938–39). If he has enjoyed life, like a good dinner-party, he should leave content; if not, he never will. But Horace's lines suggest that, while the party is still going strong, we should put away our toys—the eating and drinking, the lovemaking or poetry-writing (*ludere*)—and get ready to depart. The old diatribe-wisdom leaves a bitter taste now. But it reinforces, once more, the urgency of studying philosophy, which is finally a rehearsal for death.⁷

Poetry may be a game, but not in the way its detractors suppose. Although it arises from a play-instinct, it requires intense discipline, effort, and concentration. It may, to be sure, distract one from life's most urgent obligation, the business of living well, and dying well; but it may also provide, as in Horace's *Epistles*, a means of exploring the conflicting demands of human life and our usually inconsistent response to those demands.⁸ On a different view, Book 1 of the *Epistles* is finally playful (like the renounced lyrics of *Odes* 1–3) in its artistic arrangement, its juxtapositions and more distant contrasts of

⁷ That we should enjoy life like a good dinner-party and leave content when the time comes was a commonplace of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe, which largely influenced Lucretius 3.938–39, 957–60, which in turn influenced Horace, S. 1.1.117–19 (119 *conviva satur*, followed by his own metasatirical 120 *iam satis est*); for a careful analysis of Lucretius' precedents and especially his use of Bion here, see Wallach 61–77. If *Satire* 1.1 generalizes human folly and discontent, the harsh ending of *Epistle* 2.2 subjects Horace, along with everyone else, to the Lucretian warning. He has eaten and drunk enough at life's party, and has "played enough," whether at lovemaking or poetry-writing (*lusisti satis*: a bitterly ironic reprise of S. 1.1.120, above). Indeed, he may have thought of these lines as his literary finale, closing the published work begun with *Satire* 1.1 and heralding, at no great distance, his departure from life. His return to play/love/poetry in *Ode* 4.1 will be a creative and emotional rebirth.

⁸ Macleod's fine statement (1979: 286) about *Epistles* 1 would apply equally well to *Epistle* 2.2:

So poetry is an obstacle to sound living, because art is not life, and because the artist, as such, cannot but be appealing to a public rather than improving himself. This severe view of poetry [sc. in *Ep.* 1.1] emerges elsewhere in *Epistles* 1, notably in 3 and 19; but it is there accompanied by a distinctly contrasting one. Writing is a part of life, and as an art is like ethics, the art of living; so good or bad qualities of the work—for example, sober independence, or slavish imitation and ambitious overreaching—correspond to moral achievements or failures of the man. The contradiction in this double view of poetry is never resolved; or rather, the only resolution is in the *Epistles* themselves. They are that because their controlled and polished verbal art is a fine instrument for probing moral problems. This claim is in fact implicit in *Ep.* 1.1.12 [sc. on storing up provisions/writing poetry]. . . . This conception of the moral value of poetry is further expressed in what he says of Homer in *Epistle* 2. However, by the same token, to write is not to have achieved wisdom; and that Horace has not achieved it becomes plain in what follows. His aspirations to philosophy are those of a restless, helpless and indecisive human being. . . .

incompatible feelings and attitudes. The pursuit of *verum atque decens* heralded in *Epistle* 1.1 never reaches closure. And Horace's resignation from poetry-writing will lead, before very long, to the *Carmen Saeculare* and the beautiful *Odes* of Book 4.

Before returning to Horace's *pueri ludentes*, I want to emphasize how much poetry and philosophy complement, not oppose, each other in the longer *Epistles*. Taken together, these amount to Horace's poetic last will and testament. The *Ars Poetica*, arguably the earliest of the three, describes and bequeaths to later generations, represented by the young Pisones, what Horace has learned about the craft of poetry-writing.⁹ *Epistles* 2.2 and 2.1 discuss poetry-writing in relation, first to the poet's life, then to the state. But the *Ars Poetica* and *Epistle* 2.2 reflect on each other especially, like an artistic diptych, in the matter of decorum. In the *Ars*, the successful writer is one who understands and accepts, among other things, the decorum of life's changes: most notably, in depicting the Four Ages of Man. Conversely, in *Epistle* 2.2, the tortured discipline of writing well seems to model forth that other discipline, of living well, that philosophy is most importantly about. The two disciplines embrace each other by turns, each clarifying the other and giving it meaning in an ongoing reciprocal clarification of two unknowns, so that the "wisdom-and-taste" (*sapere*) for which Horace rejected any lesser "trifling" comes to imply them both.

2. CHILDREN AT PLAY (*EPISTLE* 1.1.53–69)

Against the dark personal background of aging, weariness, and resignation just now described, I want to look at Horace's *pueri ludentes*, who first appear in the programmatic *Epistle* 1.1 discussed earlier. Horace has announced his retirement from the game, to pursue philosophy: but here the paradoxes begin. On the one hand, he insists on his grown-up independence. He will regulate his life as best he can, pursuing what is "true and fitting," but never fol-

⁹ The dating of the *Ars Poetica* is controversial and hypothetical arguments about the young Pisones, its addressees, are a great weariness. Frischer 17–49 argues, with all due reservations, that "the most likely date . . . is between 24 and 20 B.C." (48–49), but his potentially strongest argument (19) needs revision: "In line 269 there is an allusion to *Epist.* 1.19.11 . . ." Surely it is the other way around. The humorously elevated precept in *Ars* 269 to study Greek originals constantly, *nocturna versate manu, versate diurna*, is parodied, I would argue, at *Ep.* 1.19.11, *nocturno certare mero, putere diurno*—an example, precisely, of the kind of superficial imitation of a poet's *obiter dicta* and mannerisms that Horace is criticizing here. Add that, as Daniel Lopez-Cañete pointed out to me, Virgil and Varius appear to be alive still (in company with *ego*, Horace) at *Ars* 53–55, as they are not at *Ep.* 2.1.245–47.

lowing the dictates of any one philosophical school like a schoolboy taking dictation from a master. On the other hand, he finds himself reviewing the ABCs of moral philosophy: 27 *restat ut his ego me ipse regam solerque elementis*. He thus becomes the *opsimathês* of comedy, the “late-learner” who comes to sit among the schoolboys. But there is a further, more comical reversal.

Horace has argued, in good diatribe fashion, that rich and poor, young and old, equally need philosophy (26 *aeque neglectum pueris senibusque nocebit*); but now, the older and younger men turn childish, while the children at play, *pueri ludentes*, express adult wisdom (52–64):

vilius argentum est auro, virtutibus aurum.
 ‘o cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum est;
 virtus post nummos’: haec Ianus summus ab imo
 prodocet, haec recinunt iuvenes dictata senesque,
 laevo suspensi loculos tabulamque lacerto.
 est animus tibi, sunt mores est lingua fidesque,
 sed quadringentis sex septem milia desunt:
 plebs eris. at pueri ludentes ‘rex eris’ aiunt,
 ‘si recte facies.’ hic murus aeneus esto,
 nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa.
 Roscia, dic sodes, melior lex an puerorum est
 nenia, quae regnum recte facientibus offert,
 et maribus Curiis et decantata Camillis?

Here, as in a cartoon, the *iuvenes* and *senes* are shown as schoolchildren, taking dictation from Wall Street and giving it back in sing-song fashion; or else carrying their little knapsacks with books and slates—a line used earlier, in *Satire* 1.6, to describe the Venusian school from which Horace was so happily removed. How childish they are, all those so-called grown-ups, in their obsessive pursuit of money, money, always money. By contrast, the sing-song rhyme that the children, the *pueri ludentes* of my title, sing at play—like a skipping-rope song: *rex eris si recte facies; si non facies, non eris*—inculcates a moral truth that is not only Stoic (and thus subject to parody) but deeply Roman.¹⁰ It makes you not a front-row spectator at a third-rate play but a man who can stand up to Fortune. The *pueri ludentes* are more serious in the

¹⁰ Dilke (104) translates it nicely:
 “Do the right thing,
 You’ll be a king.
 If you don’t,
 Then you won’t.”

As Bramble (186) says, in his good Appendix 3, “The Image of the Child in Ancient Satire and Diatribe”: “‘Children at play’—a symbol of innocence, unlike the *iuvenes* at school,

end, more in touch with ultimate reality, than the grown-ups who live in what my students call “the real world” but whose underlying wishes may be very childish after all.¹¹

We see more of this childishness in the different pursuits that the *Epistle* later describes, like the legacy-hunters who “hunt rich, greedy widows with cookies and apples, and catch old men to put into their fishponds” (77–79). And we see it in the inconsistency of the rich, and also the poor, as they dart from one purpose to another—and in Horace’s own inconsistency, to which his loved and respected patron, Maecenas, pays painfully little attention.

In the end, I think, the Horace of *Epistle* 1.1 is both *senex* and *puer*. He is old in biological time, aging in his body, which may be sick, and in his mind, which is weary of the world’s games (or schools) and skeptical about their alleged value. He will not—he cannot—go back to the “old game” of writing poetry for Maecenas and Rome. Nor will he “take dictation,” whether it be from a philosophical school or from the more insidious, since more generally accepted, school of Rome. And yet: in going back to the ABCs of philosophy and the ABCs of right living (even if he can’t get much further), he is even now recovering something of the children’s playful wisdom. To be a “late-learner” is to make oneself ridiculous; but what the great world of Rome cannot grasp is that its ordinary unphilosophical pursuits—and Horace’s, with them—are a great deal more ridiculous. Yet Horace’s idiosyncratic return to school joins *puer* with *senex* in a shared, rejuvenating folly that might still make him a whole person, might still redeem his later years from weariness and failure. It is a return to play in the deepest sense: play that precedes and underlies all those different games, whether of businessmen or of poets, and of which the playful “non-poetry” of the *Epistles* themselves may be, in the end, a successful and healing incarnation.

3. THE AGES OF MAN (*ARS POETICA* 153–78)

The *puer ludens* reappears in the *Ars Poetica*, where Horace’s advice to the Pisones to preserve decorum in character-portrayal by age, gender, status,

warped by the old—are acquainted with the correct etymology: to be *rex*, one has to act *recte*, not to possess *res*.” (But the phrase, “at school,” is misleading: corruption occurs in the School of Rome.)

¹¹ Horace continues with school lessons of morality in *Epistle* 1.2: for Lollius’ improvement, of course; but he himself is moved by the continuing relevance and force of what he learned in school. Differently, at *Ep.* 2.2.195–98, the schoolboy reveling in his brief holiday sets a good example for his elders, who should make the best of their brief lives: 198 *exiguo gratoque fruaris tempore raptim* (a fine variation on *carpe diem*).

condition, and literary tradition, culminates in his description of the four Ages of Man (156–78):

aetatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores, mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis. reddere qui voces iam scit puer et pede certo signat humum, gestit paribus colludere, et iram colligit ac ponit temere et mutatur in horas.	160
imberbus iuvenis, tandem custode remoto, gaudet equis canibusque et aprici gramine campi, cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper, utilium tardus provisor, prodigus aeris, sublimis cupidusque et amata relinquere pernix.	165
conversis studiis aetas animusque virilis quaerit opes et amicitias, inservit honori, commisisse cavet quod mox mutare laboret. multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod quaerit et inventis miser abstinet ac timet uti, vel quod res omnis timide gelideque ministrat, dilator, spe longus, iners, avidusque futuri, difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti se puero, castigator censorque minorum.	170
multa ferunt anni venientes commoda secum, multa recedentes adimunt. ne forte seniles mandentur iuveni partes pueroque viriles, semper in adiunctis aevoque morabimur aptis.	175

Notice how Horace's Ages are framed by verses about the passing of time: first, the constant changes in human nature, as in the years (157 *mobilibusque . . . annis*), and finally, in a lulling, even rhythm, the tidelike movement of the years, advancing and receding, bringing gifts and taking them away again, a movement that will be repeated over and over again in the life of nature and the human species, though not, to be sure, in the sequence here described, of a single human life.

Horace's description of the Ages evidently draws on Aristotle's characterization of youth and age in *Rhetoric* 2.1389a2–90b4. For Aristotle, youth and age represent extremes of excess and deficiency: the young (*neoi*) are subject to strong but quick-changing desires; they are hot-tempered, competitive, careless about money, simple, trusting, hopeful, lofty-minded; they have courage and a sense of shame; they enjoy friends and laughter; they live by honor, not advantage; they tend to hybris; in short, their failings are those of vehemence and excess. Whereas older men (*presbyteroi*) past their prime have the diametrically opposite failings, of deficiency: their experience of life makes

them uncertain, suspicious, small-minded, ungenerous, worried about money, fearful, cold-tempered, grasping after life, and selfish; they live by the code of advantage; they are shameless and pessimistic; they live mostly in memory, talk about the past, complain a lot; they are slaves to gain; in short, both their desires and their ability to gratify them are weak. But people in their prime (*hoi akmasdotes*) combine the advantages of both extremes while avoiding their failings.¹² They unite courage with self-control and a right measure of self-confidence (not too much, not too little). This is a success story of middle life.

Horace keeps much of the Aristotelian contrast between youth and age, but with striking differences. First, he subdivides Aristotle's *neotês* into two separate stages, of child (*puer*) and youth (*iuuenis*). And second, he depicts these changes, as Aristotle had not, as a continuing process of growth and change. The child he describes has already learned to speak and walk; now he is eager to play with his fellows (*colludere*, suggesting an elementary sociability). Certainly, he is quick to change (*mutatur in horas*; Aristotle's *eumetabolos*), but that may not be so bad: his emotional outbursts are violent but brief, and his very changing may point, in Horace, to the larger mutability of human life and human nature. Indeed, the lines on the *iuuenis* begin with a further indication of change and transition. In *tandem custode remoto* we feel the older child's impatience to get out from under restraints, to assume control of his own life. His new life, like the child's, has positive joys; he loves horses, dogs, and sports; but he is malleable towards vice and resents admonitions; he is reckless, extravagant, and high-minded (or carried aloft by fancies?), led by strong desires that come and go. We feel his growing, changing reality here, his possibilities for good or bad, as we did not with Aristotle's more abstract description of youth.

In turn (and again, *conversis studiis* suggests process and continuity in human life as well as change), Horace's grown man (*aetas animusque virilis*) is very different from Aristotle's well-balanced mean. For he too, like the other Ages, is subject to problematic desires and fears. He pursues gain. He is a slave to *honor*, ambition for office and status. His friendships (*amicitiae*), placed here between wealth and rank, may be business friendships, not nearly so altruistic as the friendships of youth in Aristotle.¹³ His prudence too is businesslike, avoiding mistakes that it would take some trouble to correct.

¹² Aristotle's *akmê* (1390b4) is an abstract composite, for in his account bodily vigor peaks at 30–35, mental vigor around 49.

¹³ In the problematic line 167, (a) friendship is less altruistic than in Aristotle, being bound to wealth in what is almost a hendiadys (*quaerit opes et amicitias*); (b) the "servitude" (*doubleuouisi*) of old men to gain in Aristotle (1390a13) becomes the servitude of Horace's *vir* to status and success (*inservit honori*).

The last words on the grown man, *mutare laboret*, bring us back again to Horace's leitmotif of change and resistance to change, for old age follows. Horace's description of it is both harsher and more sympathetic than Aristotle's, and psychologically more acute. The old man is besieged by troubles, which he brings largely on himself. He is slow and fearful, afraid to use, let alone enjoy, the means he has amassed; yet his hopes lie in an increasingly uncertain future. If he dwells, like Aristotle's old man, largely in memory, and his mind reverts nostalgically to his childhood (*se puero*: have we come full circle?), it is only to complain about the degeneracy of modern life and modern youth—which is, in effect, to resist time, change, and death.¹⁴ But Horace's summary lines insist once again on nature's ineluctable law of growth and decline: 175–76 *multa ferunt anni venientes commoda secum, / multa recedentes adimunt*. In personal human terms, life's ebb is painful and sad. Horace says as much in many lyrical and nostalgic moments in the *Epistles*; his heart is not easily reconciled to the acceptance of time, change, aging, and death. Yet as a poet and a teacher of would-be poets, he insists on absolute fidelity to the laws of decorum in art, which are closely bound up with the knowledge and acceptance of reality, including the human reality of the different ages.¹⁵ The rules of poetry, of the craft that Horace has mastered and can, in some limited and ironic fashion, expound to others, have come to include a concise and very challenging portrait of human life, including, by implication, the writer's own, and reminding us (as well as himself) that the skilled professional in art still remains—like the young Pisones, like all the rest of us—an amateur at living.

¹⁴ Horace spares us, mercifully, the old man's failing powers and relapse into dependency and second childhood, a horribly negative reunion with the *puer*, as in Juv. 10.188–239 and the last of Shakespeare's seven Ages of Man: *As You Like It* II.7.163–66 “... Last scene of all ... Is second childishness and mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.” Note, however, the *balba senectus* that Horace prophesies for his poetry book at *Ep.* 1.20.18: an aging schoolmaster teaching schoolchildren their ABCs—the *elementa* that Horace taught himself, in a different sense, at *Ep.* 1.1.27. Here *senex* joins *puer* and the book comes full circle. I thank my student Richard Stanley for expounding the Jungian significance of this “Meeting of Sames.”

¹⁵ Horace appealed earlier to nature's impersonal rhythm when he was pleading for the right of younger writers to coin new words, as the revered Ancients had done in their time. All things are transient, human beings and their creations with them, and (as in Lucretius) death must constantly be balanced by birth, the forces of destruction by the forces of creation, if everything is not to perish altogether (*Ars* 60–71; *cedidere, cadentque*, of words, echoes *cedidere, cadentque* [but note the syntactical shift] at *Lucr.* 3.969).

4. BEWARE: POETS AT PLAY (EPISTLE 2.1)

The child at play reappears, as a *puella ludens* now, in *Epistle* 2.1. This is Horace's last published work: a report to Augustus on the state of the arts, and a poetic meditation, more personal than it first appears, on time, art, and culture. He begins by pleading for the rights of modern poets against a widespread prejudice in favor of the Ancients. How many years does it take, he asks, to become a Classic (i.e., part of the Canon)? Don't the Classical Authors, from Livius (Andronicus) down to Accius and Terence, have faults? Are people envious of the young, or embarrassed to unlearn the handbook stuff they were taught in school? And finally, if the Greeks had disliked novelty (*novitas*) as much as we do, whatever would be old, a Classic, for us now? It is all a matter of time, Horace argues; and of skill; and of public support. Which brings him to a quick survey of the Greeks and the Romans, with their diametrically opposed temperaments and gifts.

Of the Greeks, he says (in an "instant" version of some twenty Peripatetic lectures on the History of Greek Literature): once they achieved peace, leisure, and prosperity after the Persian Wars, they fooled around with all sorts of things, like a little girl at play (93–94, 99–100):

ut primum positis **nugari** Graecia bellis
 coepit et in vitium fortuna labier aequa,

sub nutrice puella velut si luderet infans,
 quod cupide petiit mature plena reliquit.

The Greeks were creative but, like the *puella*, they lacked steadiness of purpose. From the Roman point of view, they were childish, they just "fooled around" (*nugari*).¹⁶ And the Romans? They are brought up to be serious and businesslike—or is it, moralistic and money-loving (103–7)?

Romae dulce diu fuit et sollemne reclusa
 mane domo vigilare, clienti promere iura,
 cautos nominibus rectis expendere nummos,
 maiores audire, minori dicere per quae
 crescere res posset, minui damnosa libido.

The clash of extremes here is Aristotelian. The Greeks are too frivolous, the Romans too serious; so we might expect Horace to advocate a mean in poetry-

¹⁶ Brink 196–98 suggests that the treatment of the frivolous Greeks, based loosely on Aristotle, is less chauvinism than caricature; cf. *Ars* 323–32 on Roman materialism. (Like all students of the *Ars*, I am greatly indebted to Brink's commentary.)

writing, rather like his own practice (not least in these *Epistles*) of serious play, or playful seriousness. But there is a surprise, a comic twist; for in the one area of poetry-writing, it seems, all these serious, respectable, businesslike Romans have suddenly been transformed into frivolous amateurs (108–10):

mutavit mentem populus levis et calet uno
scribendi studio; pueri patresque severi
fronde comas vincti cenant et carmina dictant.

Young and old are joined now—in a mad rush of poetry-writing. Or rather, they don't write: they toss off poems at dinner-parties. In a comic reversal reminiscent of *Epistle* 1.1, the revered elders have left off being *severi*, have reverted to childishness. This is not the expected Aristotelian mean between frivolity and over-seriousness. It is sheer confusion, such as the *senex lenis* produces in Plautine comedy, or the *senex amator*. Rejuvenation in the wrong style.

Later on, Horace develops a more Aristotelian picture of the development of comedy, and one in which his own contribution to the development of Roman satire is strongly implied. Comedy began, as he pictures it, with simple rustic holidays. Its *libertas* in the early stages was endearing, like a small child at play.¹⁷ “How cute,” we say. But just as cute children turn quickly into rambunctious teen-agers, that seemingly-innocent play of invective and indecency got out of hand; important people were attacked by name, and comedy had to be controlled by law, both socially and, as Horace also implies (following Aristotle), aesthetically. Roman comedy and satire, and drama generally, have come a long way from those rustic beginnings—though, as Horace emphasizes, there is still a way to go. Evidently, he takes pleasure in having assisted at the growing-up ceremonies: as a poet, first; but also, and more deliberately just now, as a teacher.

Let me turn, then, to the famous passage in which Horace describes the poet as educator, and where the *puer* and *puella* make their positively last appearance (126–37):

os tenerum pueri balbumque poeta figurat,
torquet ab obscenis iam nunc sermonibus aurem,
mox etiam pectus praeceptis format amicis,
asperitatis et invidiae corrector et irae;
recte facta refert, orientia tempora notis

¹⁷ Differently, Horace may be thinking of Aeschylus' comparison of Paris, who brought destruction on Troy, to a lion cub that, reared as a friendly pet, grew up to wreak havoc on the house (*A.* 717–36).

instruit exemplis, inopem solatur et aegrum.
 castis cum pueris ignara puella mariti
 disceret unde preces, vatem ni Musa dedisset?
 poscit opem chorus et praesentia numina sentit,
 caelestis implorat aquas docta prece blandus,
 avertit morbos, metuenda pericula pellit,
 impetrat et pacem et locupletem frugibus annum.

In the first section (126–31), the poet is pictured as a sculptor of the young. He shapes the child's speech, or literally, shapes his mouth, as if from clay; he wrenches the child's ear (metaphorically, but also literally?) away from indecent language; and he shapes the child's heart and mind (*pectus*) with precepts in such a friendly, encouraging manner that the precepts seem like friends. He "corrects" the child's natural rudeness, its tendencies to envy and quick anger. He revives old examples of good, moral behavior. In lines 130–31 there is a balance between young and old, for the same poetry that educates the rising generation brings consolation, if not healing, to the elderly and sick.¹⁸

In lines 132–37 Horace is clearly thinking of his *Carmen Saeculare* (cf. 138 *carmine di superi placantur, carmine Manes*), performed in 17 B.C. on the last morning of the great Games, the *Ludi Saeculares*. Under his direction, the chorus of twenty-seven boys and twenty-seven girls, young and innocent, pray to the gods to confer and confirm all blessings upon Rome; and the gods hear them—or so they report with assurance. In Horace's verses, the poet-teacher joins imaginatively with these innocent, believing children. They represent the future of Rome, and they renew its past. Even an aging, skeptical poet may lose himself momentarily in the great participatory moment here commemorated, a moment where youth and age, play and seriousness, the old fertility magic of the night and the new religious worship of the Augustan day, are wonderfully and harmoniously joined.

Horace puts it differently in his commemorative *Ode* 4.6. There he foretells how, when one of his girl singers has grown into married womanhood, she will recall that great moment of performance with affection and nostalgia—will recall her teacher, the poet Horatius, who will by then be dead. It is, seen on one level, the usual incompatibility joke that time and nature play on Horace. But there is more. For the reconciling moment in which the innocence of youth and the experience of age are triumphantly bound together—

¹⁸ With Brink (201 n. 3), I take *orientia tempora* as referring to the "rising years," but I think Horace shifts briefly from children to elders at 131 (*inopem solatur et aegrum*), ending the first subsection of 126–38 with a nice rhetorical balance of youth and age, rising and falling years.

a moment of teaching culminating in the performance of renewal—endures in poetry like a playing child, a *puer* or *puella ludens*, who never quite grew up.

Let me end this series of *pueri* and *puellae* with the boy Ligurinus in *Ode* 4.1. He is usually treated, and rightly, as a figure of erotic desire, subverting the decorum of Horace's life and art with strong elegiac passion. But he is also, I think, a figure of Horace's younger and vitally creative self, the *puer* within the *senex*.¹⁹ And that, too, is why Horace is weeping: with the sadness, to be sure, of lost youth and love, but also with the joy of receiving back, once more, the creative, very erotic play of poetry-writing from which, with all the best reasons, he had so decisively retired.

CODA: "NOW PLAYING AT THE APA"

I want, finally, to develop a metaphor, to take some of what Horace says about play and games in regard to the craft of poetry and apply it to the craft of scholarship. This is mostly for the younger people, graduate students looking for jobs, young Ph.D.'s working as temps, gypsy scholars, etc. It is also for older people, including myself, who forget all too easily what our work, or play, is really about.

What does it mean to be a professional scholar and teacher? To work hard, we might say; to practice a craft well; to teach others to do the same. The difficulty, when you are young, is of mastering the game, or games, you want to play, and of convincing others that you've done just that. The difficulty, as you get older, is that many aspects of the game you've mastered become wearisome. Horace said it all in *Epistle* 2.2. The skills are there, but not the old spirit of energy and ambition. You grow tired. Maybe you think about retirement. You look at the young people and, on a good day, you're excited by their

¹⁹ Putnam (45) puts it well:

As the speaker's unexpected, youthful love, Ligurinus serves as a reminder of exactly what he appears to be, evanescent youth and eroticism. For the poet, however, this attractive dulcet-toned, winged creature is also the lure of the lyric past, the pull toward the voice and song of private desire that once was, but can no longer be, his. Ligurinus is very much the speaker-poet's former self.

The paradox, I think, is that Horace's younger self is not altogether lost in time, but is renewed in timeless realities of poetry and dream. Should we recall Callimachus' initiatory dream in his *Aetia* prologue, as Cameron (129–32) reconstructs it? The old poet wishes he might shed his old age (*prol.* 34–37); then "Lines 37–38 must begin a section that culminated in the old poet falling asleep and his young counterpart meeting the Muses in a dream." The same passage, joining irony and rejuvenation of spirit, may have been reflected in the passage from Horace's *Ode* 3.4, on the Muse-protected child, with which I began this essay; differently, Cameron (180) compares *Ode* 4.3.1–2, *Quem tu, Melpomene, semel / nascentem placido lumine videris*.

energy, their ambition, their enthusiasm. On a bad day, you envy that energy, that hopefulness—even as they, perhaps, on a bad day envy what seems your easy, settled place as a full, a *very* full, professor. You know, on all days, the challenge of the craft: how hard it is, not to play the game, but to play it well. And you know, as Samuel Johnson did, that scholarly ambition falls under the “Vanity of Human Wishes” (like the wish for *eloquentia* in Juvenal 10): “Resistless burns the fever of renown, Caught from the strong contagion of the Gown” (137–38). Sometimes, as you get older, the game doesn’t seem worth the candle. But also, as you get older, some of the superficial desires may fall away, leaving the craft itself, the *ars*, as what you care about. You “just do it,” as they say. Because it is there. And because you love it. Which brings me back from the professional to the amateur, from games to play, and from the *senex* or *anus* to the *pueri puellaeque ludentes*.

We began as amateurs. We took up the Classics, at school or college, because we had good teachers who were very serious and/or very playful about what they did; and because, when we worked at Greek, or Latin, or history, or philosophy, or whatever it was we did well, we found to our surprise that our work was also our play, what we did, not just out of ambition or fear, but out of love. It was a good place to be. By the end of my freshman year, I knew that my calling was to teach Classics. And it still surprises and delights my spirit today that I got away with it, got away with teaching poetry and plays, of all things—with teaching Horace and Virgil, Euripides and Aristophanes—instead of going dutifully and miserably into the family business.

I liked being an amateur, at college. It had something of child’s play about it. And I didn’t like giving up my amateur status when I went to graduate school and entered the profession. I know, I tell them now: it’s a serious business to learn the craft, if you want to do it well. Your younger, playful, spontaneous, loving self must give way to the more-or-less respectable, grown-up *persona* you need now to assume, the professional *ethos* you need to project. But as you struggle to make a place for yourself in the professional world—to establish yourself as a young pro—you are in danger of losing the sense of play with which you started and letting the game, or games, take over. Which happens in all professions. We are all invited, more or less obviously, to disregard our deeper selves. To sell our soul, as they used to say (and, in our profession, to sell it rather cheap).

So what I tell my graduate students is (and when I tell them, I’m also reminding myself): “Cultivate a professional mind, but keep an amateur heart.” Which is to say: Never stop reminding yourself why you went into this business in the first place. People do this differently. I remember how, when I was younger and felt intimidated (to put it mildly) by APA meetings, I would

sometimes go to my friend T's room (T for Tityrus) and read one of Virgil's *Eclogues* with him. For that pastoral world of leisure and love—of singing shepherds, or shepherd-poets, or shepherd-poet-scholars—was where we had started on our Virgilian course, and where we most deeply belonged, and where we needed to return, from time to time, to be renewed in mind and spirit—if only for the work, and for the wars.

It is the play element in scholarship—what you do for its own sake—that renews and sustains us, whether through graduate school, or as harassed junior faculty, or as weary senior faculty: that sustains us through all the work and all the wars—not least, the struggle of communicating our passion to others in the midst of a world that cares very little for either scholarship or education. It is the play element, too, I believe, that keeps us honest, keeps us doing what we do, in some part at least, for its own sake, and not for the rewards (or to avoid the threats). And maybe, if we are lucky, even as we grow older and wearier of the various games, maybe that *puer* or *puella ludens* of ours will reappear in our lives, brighter and lovelier than ever before; and our tears, like Horace's, will be tears of sadness, but also tears of joy.²⁰

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²⁰ In Philadelphia my Presidential Address was prefaced with slides of children at play taken from Huskinson. Thanks to Rachel Fru and G. Kenneth Sams for these; to Lois Hinckley and Michael Putnam, as ever, for their advice and encouragement; and to the members of my Fall 1999 graduate seminar in Horace's *Epistles*, for their playful companionship.

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