

Pope's Horatian Mask

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Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem

Cogitat, ut speciosa dehinc miracula promat

“Not smoke from flame, but light from smoke

So, as then to reveal striking and marvelous things”

-Horace, Ars Poetica

Few literary icons are as inextricably connected in critical tradition as Alexander Pope and Quintus Horatius (Horace). Critical theory continues to find strong links in the style of Pope's and Horace's works. While critics have moved away from describing Pope's later satire as completely Horatian (see Kupersmith 65), there continues to be relatively little analysis into the motivations behind Pope's *Imitations of Horace*. Pope made no effort to hide his admiration for the ancient Roman early in his career, penning twelve imitations of Horace (Stack 278) in addition to many epistles and essays which draw heavily from Horace's works. Pope so idolized Horace that his *Imitations of Horace* spawned a re-popularization of the imitation genre in his time (Stack 21). It would not be a stretch to say that Horace was one of, if not the single biggest, literary influences on the eighteenth-century poet we now consider a master of the English language. But the relationship was not that straightforward. I argue that Pope consciously manipulated and played on the perceived relationship between them to serve his own ends. Although he took inspiration from Horace the Moralist early in his career, Pope came to regard Horace's satire as ineffectual; instead, from the mid-1730s onwards he cultivated disingenuous parallels with Horace the Satirist in order to mask his more aggressive satire and protect his interests.

The beginning of George II's reign in 1727, the increase of Walpole's power and the nomination of Cibber as Poet Laureate in 1730, and the Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 demonstrated to Pope the need for a more scathing satire but also prudence, especially for an outspoken Catholic Tory like himself. As his work became more aggressive, Pope would have been all too aware of the dangers he risked. Griffin demonstrates the knife's edge satirists of this time, especially one as popular yet marginalized as Pope, would have to navigate: "on the one hand, critics denounced satire as malevolent and destructive, an affront to the dignity of human nature and a threat to the commonwealth; on the other, critics and practitioners countered by insisting that satire was a highly moral art, motivated by the love of virtue and serving as a useful censor of public and private morals" (Griffin 24). Pope was aware that eighteenth-century English society had an intimate knowledge of Horace: a total of thirty-eight imitations of Horace were published by other authors in the same decade Pope published his (Stack 21), most including a short biography of Horace (Kupersmith 110). Horace was the favored court poet of Emperor Augustus, known for telling his Emperor "what he wished to hear, and not saying what he did not wish to hear" (Weinbrot 400). Horace had a "lamentable willingness to serve Augustus, the usurper who insists upon flattery and satire upon mild folly not extreme vice" (406). Precisely because this was the opposite of Pope's mantra, Horace would serve as the perfect disguise for him. Having idolized Horace for his moral philosophies early in his career, Pope evolved his idea of the Roman poet to an ironic hero. By the mid-1730s, Pope would begin to use Horace's works and the public perception of them to mask and protect his own much different satire.

Pope's use of Horace's satire as a mask for his true intentions later in his career only worked because of Pope's inspiration from Horace's moral works earlier on, in *Essay on*

Criticism (1711) and *Essay on Man (1733)* in particular. To Pope's contemporaries, Horace was first and foremost a moralist before a satirist (Stack 4). The distinction is at times subtle, especially with the more subtle forms of satire such as Horace's. A moralist would be "Chiefly depreciative. A person given to moralizing or making moral judgements; a person who seeks to dictate or prescribe the morals of others" ("Moralist"), whereas a satirist is someone who creates "A poem, a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary" ("Satirist"). Both are inherently "depreciative," meaning both focus on the negatives of human behavior, so the distinction lies in the position, intent, and selected target of the artist. The satirist must expose vice, but for credibility's sake the satirist must be separate from those same vices. Should this position be sufficiently above the corrupted, the satirist could become the moralist, imploring the sinful to change from a position of unquestionable moral superiority. Another determining factor is the reason behind exposing the vice: a moralist will aim to educate and thus instigate change. Yet a satirist may only seek to entertain, and the most bitter of satirists may not even believe change is possible; instead, they seek only to ridicule. Last is the expected audience: the moralist will generally focus on society in general whereas the satirist needs to narrow the focus of their target for effect. Horace was a pioneer of satire because he blended the line between the moralist and satirist: "Horatian satire offers a subtle and coherent view of moral life and personal growth. The aim of this satire is self-discovery, inner contentment, and the richness of personal relationships" (Stack 5). Importantly, however, Horace's satire leaned dramatically towards the more conservative end of the satire spectrum. Comparing Horatian satire to Juvenalian satire, Joseph Trapp explains, "The one is pleasant and facetious; the other angry and austere: the one smiles; the other storms: the Foibles of Mankind

are the Object of the one; greater Crimes, of the other” (quoted in Griffin 24). Pope’s artistic maturation would take his style from Horatian moralist to Horatian satirist, then finally disguised Juvenalian satirist. In Pope’s main early works, we find the Horatian moralist qualities dominating. *An Essay on Criticism*, published when Pope was just twenty-three years old, reflects his first major inspiration from Horace. Rogers identifies the work’s origins: “Addison...likened the work to Horace’s *Art of Poetry* in its orderly but not mechanically regular development of the critical argument. Horace is certainly a prime model for the *Essay*” (Rogers 580). There are no “loaded references,” “no particular examples which might strain social harmony or test social politeness” (Piper 509). Instead, the piece is generalized, safe behind universal statements and mild condemnation:

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;

The Ancients only, or the Moderns Prize. (396-97)

.....

Some ne’er advance a judgement of their own. (408)

.....

LEARN then what MORAL critics ought to show. (560)

Pope points out the vices of critics, but there is no person that could reasonably take direct offense. *An Essay on Criticism* reads more as a list of accepted critiques on an aspect of society, published to educate, but not to change any specific reader. Also in the Horatian moral vein is *An Essay on Man*. Originally intended as part of a much larger concept that was to be his magnum opus, *Essay on Man* was conceived as “a system of Ethics in the Horatian way”

(Kupersmith 65). Comparable to *An Essay on Criticism*, Pope again lists complaints and vices, but lacks strong emotion in his speaker and refrains from throwing any specific jabs. “Subtle schoolmen” (II 81) and “let Stoics boast” (II 101) are common examples of indirect references; the sharp bite of Pope’s later satire is still absent. Piper applauds *An Essay on Man* as superior to *An Essay on Criticism* based on the presence of “a divergent view of man from that which he himself is taking,” but expresses disappointment in Pope, stopping short: “if the opposing view is worth considering, worth destroying, its proponents are worthy of explicit acknowledgement” (Piper 511). Piper is expressing frustrations with the Horatian style that Pope would soon come to feel himself. This sense of limitation in the face of increasingly frustrating real-world events would lead to Pope’s evolution away from being a Horace-inspired moral satirist towards fierce Juvenalian satirist.

As Pope moved into his mid forties, we begin to see a change in the style of his works. By the mid 1730s Pope begins to target not society in general, but specific marks. *An Epistle to Burlington* (1731), *Epistle to a Lady* (1735), and especially *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (1735) demonstrate an escalating departure from Horatian moral satire. Replying to the real Dr. Arbuthnot, Pope famously said, “general satire in times of general vice has no force, and is no punishment” (quoted in Rogers 662). John Dryden compares Horatian satire to comedy, while Juvenalian satire on the other hand is tragic (Griffin 24): “The upright man who looks with horror on the corruptions of his time, his heart consumed with anger and frustration” (Elliot). Juvenalian satire is typified by a desire to change society by directly disparaging the corrupt and immoral individual, very different from Horace’s moral-based satire. This is perfectly encapsulated in *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*: “Sporus, that mere white curd of ass’s milk” (306) “His wit all seesaw, between that and this, / Now high, now low, now master up, now miss, /

And he himself one vile antithesis” (323-25). Sporus, or Lord Hervey, is just one from a long list of people Pope directly attacks, including Horace himself. Pope uses *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* to signal a new satiric style while also beginning to distance himself from Horace. *Dr. Arbuthnot* was written after four of Pope’s imitations of Horace and before the remaining eight, yet Pope is already dropping hints as to his true feelings of Horace – “Proud as Apollo on his forked hill, / Sate full-blown Bufo, puffed by every quill; / Fed with soft dedication all day long, / Horace and he went hand in hand in song” (231-34). At once Pope begins to use the imitations of Horace as a cover while dropping hints as to his real feelings of the man as a politician and satirist.

Friend and mentor Lord Bolingbroke suggested imitating *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace* to Pope as his next work. “The satires particularly ‘hit [Pope’s] case’, as Bolingbroke put it, because of the opportunities for political comment but also because Horace himself confronts the public role of the satirist in terms of which [Pope] could exploit” (Rogers 643). “Exploit” would end up being a good word for how Pope treated all his *Imitations of Horace*, stretching “imitation” to its limit. This imitation would be the first step towards Pope becoming the “combative political satirist using Horace as a mask for Juvenalian attacks on the Hanoverian court and its Whig ministry” (Kupersmith 74). Frank Stack describes imitation as a popular poetic tradition dating back to the mid-seventeenth century, but Pope gave it two twists (Stack 18). Firstly, Pope extended the creative license of an imitation. According to Stack, there are two types of imitation:

one was the careful consecutive modernizing of a single poem which was, in effect, a form of translation designed for those who do not know the original....By contrast, a

second form of Imitation involves not just modernization but the deliberate alteration of meaning in order to create a different poem. (Stack 19-20)

Pope's imitations fall squarely into the second form, as I will detail below. The use of this imitation form is revealing given his second twist: the publishing of the original and the imitation in parallel text format, deliberately drawing attention to any differences (Tupper 181). Not only was Pope changing the texts of Horace's *Satires*, but he wanted his readers to pay close attention to those changes. It is in those changes to Horace's work that Pope reveals his first foray into Juvenalian satire. Throughout the *Imitations of Horace* Pope routinely subverts Horace's original meaning: "where Horace speaks with full appreciation of the work of his predecessor, Lucilius,...Pope in the parallel passage, instead of following Horace, mercilessly attacks Blackmore" (Tupper 188). Pope also adds lines with no corresponding line in the original (184) or extends a short line into mini-declarations, for example when Horace "simply states that he writes because he cannot sleep," Pope turns it into a four-line stanza subtly insulting his targets (200). By placing the original next to this, Pope could be sure of the reader's attention on the expanded lines. As much as he added material, Pope also relied on the original content to protect him:

Horace, who does not spare his satire in speaking of the meanness of Avidienus, who, he says, was rightly called a dog, is followed by Pope, who employs the identical name as a screen for attacking Wortley Montagu and for defaming his wife under the drastic epithets of "dog" and "bitch" respectively. It gave Pope his answer, if he were charged with slandering Montagu and his wife. (Tupper 189)

Tupper is referring to *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*, published in 1737. Here Pope protects himself from potential libel or defamation lawsuits, growing ever bolder in the absence of such charges. Two months later, Pope published *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace Imitated*, more commonly known as *The Epistle to Augustus*. Each successive imitation is now consecutively testing the political waters, Pope moving more and more into Juvenalian satire with each before finally diving headlong in with *The New Dunciad* (1743). *The Epistle to Augustus* would push these boundaries as Pope never had before, going after King George II himself.

Foreshadowing the manipulation of Horace to his advantage, Pope would often use the burgeoning publishing process to help him achieve his goals. Pope would anonymously publish works he believed his enemies would celebrate, hoping to embarrass them twice over: first when he revealed himself and second when they realized the work they had just celebrated was satire or irony (Kupersmith 108). Such was the danger of satirizing even an unpopular king that Pope used this anonymity in conjunction with the established strength of his Horatian mask to publish the longest of his imitations, *Imitations of Horace Epistle II. i*, more commonly known as *The Epistle to Augustus*. The use of this particular Horatian imitation is a move away from direct satire to satire through situational irony. Emperor Augustus Caesar was known to severely limit who could dedicate anything to him, but Horace's original piece was dedicated to Augustus at his explicit command (109). Pope describes Horace's feelings towards the Emperor in the original work as, "he paints with all the great and good qualities of a monarch upon whom the Romans depended for the increase of an *absolute empire*" (quoted in Theall). King George Augustus on the other hand was known to care little for the arts, to the point of complete ignorance: "If the reader knows the context in which Horace composed his epistle to Augustus,

and many eighteenth-century readers would because the *vita Horati* was found in virtually every edition of Horace, Pope's imitation becomes funnier" (Theall 109-10). The imitation then focuses primarily on this literary difference, focusing mainly on themes such as contemporary taste in poetry and the role of the poet in society (Stack 151). This afforded Pope an opportunity: "the very literary subject of the epistle made George an easy secondary target, and allowed Pope to exploit the ironic contrast between Horace's relationship with Augustus and Pope's with George" (Kupersmith 109). Though published anonymously, it being an imitation of Horace praising "Augustus" meant Whig supporters would initially have loved this piece, but Pope uses the situational irony masterfully to create the satiric effect. Taking advantage of Emperor Augustus's military success compared to King George II's denial of personal glory at the hands of Walpole's pacifism (Theall), Pope ironically states "Your arms, your actions, your repose to sing! / What seas you travers'd! and what fields you fought! / Your country's peace, how oft, how dearly bought!" (Imitations, II.i. 395-97). Had Pope not published anonymously certain lines would have shattered the irony; instead, Pope's publishing tricks enhance his art: "a fate attends on all I write, / That when I aim at praise, they say I bite" (408-9) followed by "Praise underserv'd is scandal in disguise" (413). This is Pope at his most cunning use of Horace, demonstrating the exploitation of medium for artistic benefit that defines their relationship. Pope's use of Horace as a mask had proven extremely effective, but, as his satire became increasingly pointed, the ruse was beginning to become apparent.

The two *Epilogues to the Satires* (1738) would be Pope's last use of this mask. Originally published as *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty-Eight: A Dialogue Something Like Horace*, it has in fact very little in common with Horace (Kupersmith 117). *The Epilogues* are instead Pope using the Horatian mask ironically to declare the very weaknesses of the

Horatian satire form. It seems Pope had a difficult time putting this declaration together, it being the most re-corrected composition he worked on (Rogers 684). That is understandable given the importance of this piece: proclaiming a final shift in his style, putting his readers on high alert for the shock that would happen with the last version of *The Dunciad*. Pope begins the first *Epilogue* with almost disparaging everything he has worked on the last few years with Horace:

Not twice a twelve-month you appear in print,
 And when it comes, the court see nothing in't.
 You grow *correct*, that once with rapture writ,
 And are, besides, too *moral* for a wit. (Ep. I 1-4)

The morals mentioned are a direct reference to Horace the Moralist: “This interpretation of Horace as a moral teacher was unquestionably of great importance to Pope” (Stack 5). “Correct” and “moral” are key words, as they pertain to Pope’s disavowal of Horace. Pope has had enough of being correct, what we would now call “politically correct.” The court is no longer scared by Pope’s pen; Horace’s style, Pope feels, has dulled the sting of his words. *Dialogue I* is then effectively a conversation against Horace’s satire: the friend persona’s comment that his “sly, polite, insinuating smile / [that] Could please at Court, and make Augustus smile” (Epilogue I 19-20) is contrasted with the Pope persona’s “And let, a-God’s name, every fool and knave / Be graced through life, and flattered in his grave” (85-86). Pope is declaring the need for stronger weapons than those Horace has supplied him with:

Virtue, I grant you, is an empty boast:

But shall the dignity of Vice be lost?
Ye Gods! Shall Cibber's son without rebuke,
Swear like a lord, or Rich out-whore a duke? (Ep. I 113-16)

Even as Pope pretends to lament the weakness of his satire, he attacks those same enemies. Ironically, Pope is now using Juvenalian satire to attack Horace himself in an imitation of Horace. All the key traits of Juvenalian satire are present, the direct references, the desire to change society, and the anger:

See, all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
Are what ten thousand envy and adore. (Ep. I 164-47)

Pope at once distances his politics, "there was one who held it in disdain" (Ep. I 172), and his satire from Horace. The tone of this poem is starkly different from that of the previous *Imitations*, and his bitterness shows through. Piper here sees the pinnacle of Pope's progression:

The allusion to *An Essay on Man* in the last couplet of the Epilogue wonderfully reveals Pope's development, his growth, as a conversational poet: from an uncritical flow of politeness through a series of intense and searching social addresses to the hopeless grace of the Epilogue and the hopeless silence at its close. (Piper 522)

The same year the *Epilogues* were published, Pope published his own epitaph:

Heroes, and kings! Your distance keep:
 In peace let one poor poet sleep,
 Who never flattered folks like you:
 Let Horace blush, and Virgil too. (Epitaph 1-4)

Pope, now having used Horace for all he could, works to distance himself from him. While Horace the Moralist inspired Pope early on and Horace the Satirist provides a convenient mask, Pope also works to ensure he is not connected to Horace the appeaser and flatterer. Horatian imitations and satire had run their course, and Pope now looked for sharper weapons with which to face his foes.

Pope had the heart of a moralist, but his era needed a satirist more. “‘Law can pronounce judgement only on open Facts,’ says Pope...‘Morality alone can pass censure on Intentions of mischief; so that for secret calumny or the arrow flying in the dark, there is no publick punishment left, but what a good writer inflicts’” (quoted in Griffin 188). However, the modern reader must be conscious of the era Pope was writing in. Early in his career Pope was “the poet of polite conversation his age required – by nature as well as by cultural prompting” (Piper 507). But as he and his work became more recognized, Pope also came under the microscope. Pope faced possible incarceration after the publishing of *Imitation of Horace, Epistle to Augustus* (Rogers 674), in addition to the social, economic, and even physical retributions from his many literary victims. Joseph Spence, author and friend of Pope, once related a story of Pope after the publication of an early edition of *The Dunciad*:

I had been reading some things to him out of Bayle's Dictionary in his study, to turn to the article Bruschius, a poet of Bohemia, who, when he was going to publish a Satire against some of the blockheads of that country, was way-laid in a wood, and murdered by them. Something of the same nature had been then lately hinted at as to Ham walk. I read the article to Mr. Pope, and said something that I thought my friendship obliged me to say about his venturing alone to Richmond. He said, that the people I mentioned were low and vile enough perhaps to be capable of such designs, but that he should not go a step out of his way for them; for let the very worst that I could imagine happen, he thought it better to die, than to live in fear of such rascals. (Spence 38-39)

Polite society was only beginning to gauge the boundaries of free speech — satire experienced a golden age in the early eighteenth-century to test those very limits. Yet Pope had more to say with more vitriol to say it with than his society was ready to accept, thus Pope needed Horace. Pope's manipulation of Horace's works, adapting and arguably improving the *Satires* to disguise yet not sacrifice the fierceness of his delivery remains a critically underappreciated years-long process.

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