



2007

Horace's Body, Horace's Books

Joseph Farrell

University of Pennsylvania, jfarrell@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/classics_papers

 Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Farrell, Joseph. (2007). Horace's Body, Horace's Books. In S.J. Heyworth, P.G. Fowler, and S.J. Harrison (Eds.), *Classical Constructions: Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist and Epicurean* (pp. 174-193). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/classics_papers/139
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Horace's Body, Horace's Books

Abstract

This chapter attempts to engage in a specific modification of a well-known and widely subscribed-to theory about the representation of the human body in literature and the visual arts. And the Latin text with which the chapter will do these things is that of Horace. It compares two generically distinct and self-contained 'publications', namely the first book of *Sermones* and the first three books of *Odes*. It addresses the question: What sorts of bodies does Horace represent in these two collections?

Keywords

Horace, human body, visual arts, *Sermones*, *Odes*

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Classics

Horace's Body, Horace's Books

Joseph Farrell

I'd like to begin with an anecdote, one that would probably be familiar even if Tom Stoppard had not given it new currency in *The Invention of Love*.¹ When asked whether an aspiring American classicist in the year 1920 should study in England or Germany, Housman reportedly said:

Before the war an American student coming to Europe would go to a German University where the Professor would tell him to count the number of times that Cicero uses the word 'et'. He will now come to Cambridge and go to Mr. Sheppard, who will tell him to write a thesis on 'Thersites as the Hero of the *Iliad*', or 'The *Aeolus* of Euripides in the light of the theories of Dr. Freud.' I think he would be far better employed counting the number of times Cicero uses the word 'et'.²

If we are speaking of things to do with a Latin text, counting the words is certainly one of them, and under some circumstances it can be among the most useful. The Housman anecdote suggests that counting and interpreting are antithetical activities or better, perhaps, that they are so different as to have nothing to do with or say to one another. But here we should follow Don Fowler's example; for what I value most about Don's work is the way in which it puts practical philology into productive dialogue with criticism and

¹ The anecdote was related in the production that ran at the Wilma Theatre in Philadelphia from 9 February to 17 March 2000. It does not appear in the published version of the script, Stoppard (1998).

² Graves (1979) 209.

theory.³ Characteristically, his work seeks to do more than to shine the light of interpretative approaches acquired from some other discipline onto classical material. One of Don's great strengths is the way in which he uses his expertise as a classicist to advance interdisciplinary theoretical discussion, applying rigorous scrutiny to the theory as well as to the text. So in tribute to Don, I will try, *impari passu*, to do something of the same sort. By indulging myself in the humble activity of word-counting, and the very slightly more elevated technique of sorting, I will attempt to engage in a specific modification of a well-known and widely subscribed-to theory about the representation of the human body in literature and the visual arts. And the Latin text with which I will do these things is that of Horace.

The body of my title is not the physical body, but the discursive one that is capable of being represented in dichotomous modes. One mode commonly goes by the name 'grotesque', while the other is most often labelled 'classical'.⁴ It is the use of the term 'classical' that makes this inquiry especially interesting to me; and my decision to interrogate the prehistory of this aesthetic canon in Horace is due to the fact that Horace himself is frequently regarded as one of the

³ For Don's own none-too-reverential attitude towards Housman, see Fowler (1987) 93.

⁴ Those who use these opposing terms of reference frequently cite Bakhtin (1964). In their influential work on transgression, for instance, Peter Sallibrass and Allon White write that 'At various points throughout this book we have turned to Bakhtin's vocabulary of "classical" and "grotesque" in our exploration of high/low symbolism' (Sallibrass and White (1986) 21). More recently, John Henderson, in an insightful essay on the dialogue between these opposing principles in ancient Greek vase painting (Henderson (1999) 43 n.2), cites Sallibrass and White as 'the clearest exegesis' of the opposition ascribed to Bakhtin. Bakhtin himself, however, is critical of the term 'classical' in this context, which can only create confusion by suggesting that the conception of the body that it designates is somehow characteristic of 'classical' (i.e. of a high-mindedly homogeneous ancient Greco-Roman) *mentalité*. Bakhtin states clearly that this is not the case. Historically, he regards the 'classical' conception of the body as a product of the early modern period ('In the official literature of European peoples it has existed only for the last four hundred years', 319); and accordingly, he opposes to the grotesque body not 'the classical body' but 'the new bodily canon' (320 and passim; my emphasis). The distinction that I draw in this paper is not between the 'grotesque' and either the 'classical' body or Bakhtin's 'new bodily canon'. Rather, I hope to show that while the satirical body of *Sermones* 1 corresponds rather well to Bakhtin's grotesque body, the lyric body of *Odes* 1–3 in particular owes something to both of Bakhtin's bodily categories.

foundational theorists of 'the classical body'—thanks specifically, of course, to the opening lines of the *Ars poetica*, where a well-designed poem is compared to a well-proportioned body.⁵ My suspicion that I would find Horace's poetic *corpus* a useful instrument for thinking about the classical body arose from an observation that I made in another connection. In working on the various ways in which Ovid represents his own body in passages of highly tendentious apologetics, I noticed some antecedents in the works of Horace.⁶ Hence my testing of assumptions about the classical body in the works of Horace will give rise to some observations about the way in which Horace represents his own body as well.

But before I start promulgating and testing theories, I want to crunch some numbers. My procedure will be to compare two generically distinct and self-contained 'publications', (as it were) namely the first book of *Sermones* and the first three books of *Odes*.⁷ What sorts of bodies does Horace represent in these two collections?

One might begin to answer this question in various ways. I will follow a lexical approach by collecting the different body parts strewn throughout Horace's oeuvre and assembling them into an aggregate Horatian body. This procedure shows that the works in question share a fairly large vocabulary pertaining to the body. In this respect they differ little from one another and, probably, from most other Latin texts. The relative frequency of words pertaining to the body is also about the same in both works. *Odes* 1–3 is a corpus of about 11,000 words, and of these over 200 refer to the body in whole or in part. That is a frequency of about 2 per cent. *Sermones* 1 contains about 7,000 words, of which about 140 refer to the body—again, a frequency of about 2 per cent. So the sheer presence of bodies, so measured, is about the same in both texts. The number of discrete lexical items, too, is roughly comparable: *Sermones* 1 employs a

⁵ Horace *Ars P.* 1–12.

⁶ Farrell (1999).

⁷ This paper was first written before the appearance of Hutchinson (2002), who argues that Horace did not originally conceive of *Odes* 1–3 as a unified collection, and opens the possibility that the individual books were published separately from about 26 to 23 BC. On the other hand, it is clear that in books 2 and 3 Horace worked to impose unity upon the collection as a whole, so that many of the arguments based on such a unity (of the sort represented most elaborately by Santirocco (1986)) can still, with due caution, be made. I will return to this point.

lexicon of 54 words to denote the body and its various parts, while *Odes* 1–3 use a somewhat larger vocabulary of 64 words.

If we were to go on this information alone, we would conclude that the discourse of the body is about equally important to the *Sermones* and to the *Odes*, or perhaps that it is slightly more important in the *Odes*, where we find a somewhat larger vocabulary of body words. But besides the sheer frequency of words that refer to the body and its parts, it is important to notice what words and what parts get mentioned in each collection. I've said that the two collections share a large number of words that refer to the body. The total size of Horace's lexicon of the body extends to some 83 words. Of these, 35—a bit less than half—occur in both collections. But the remaining 48 words tell a different story. Of these, 19 occur in only in *Sermones* 1 and 29 only in *Odes* 1–3. (I notice again in passing the greater number of different body words in the *Odes*.) What is more, if we examine the character of words that are confined to one or the other collection, a clear distinction between the two works starts to emerge. Those words that are unique to the *Sermones* tend to involve organs associated with digestion, elimination of waste, copulation, and so forth. The organs concerned are sometimes designated by conventional euphemisms (as for instance *inguina* = 'groin' and *lumbi* = 'loins', both ~ 'penis'),⁸ sometimes named in plain, blunt, and even obscene language—e.g. *uenter* ('belly'), *cunnius* ('cunt'),⁹ *clunes* ('buttocks'), *uesica* ('bladder'), and so forth—or, occasionally, unmarked language names them metaphorically, as in the designation of the male sexual organs as *testes caudamque salacem* (*Serm.* 1.2.45). *Cauda* here is instructive: it happens to occur once in the *Odes* as

⁸ 'The euphemistic use of *inguen* (= *mentula* or *cunnius*) was established in all types of Latin' (Adams (1982) 47, citing *inter alia* Horace, *Serm.* 1.2.26, 116). 'In sexual contexts *lumbus* (generally in the plural) for the most part occurs in descriptions of the movements of seduction or copulation. . . . In a few other places *lumbus* seems to be used of a vaguely defined area within which the sexual organs might be situated, but not necessarily coterminous with them', although 'it might sometimes have been interpreted as a euphemism for a sexual organ' (Adams (1982) 48).

⁹ '*Cunnius* was the basic obscenity for the female pudenda. . . . Such words occur in the speech of all classes when the speaker wishes to create an impact by using a word of strong taboo character. . . . Horace uses the word three times in the first book of *Sermones* (1.2.36, 1.2.70, 1.3.107), but thereafter it is not found in satire' (Adams (1982) 80–81).

well, but the difference between the two passages is sharp.¹⁰ The word of course means 'tail', and at *Odes* 2.19.31 that is all it means: Cerberus' tail, to be precise, which the infernal hound wags happily at the approach of Bacchus. There the word is, like Cerberus himself, *insons*. In the *Sermones*, the word is used in place of 'penis'. The usage is metaphorical, but there is no question of Horace's metaphor being euphemistically coy or polite. The epithet *salacem* ('lewd') makes the tone of the passage clear enough.¹¹

In the *Odes* we encounter a rather different image of the body. First, it is an image free of the base associations that we have just been discussing. It is an image in which (to quote Mikhail Bakhtin) 'the leading role is attributed' not to the nether regions, but 'to the individual and expressive parts of the body: the head, face, eyes, lips...'.¹² As in the *Sermones*, vocabulary fixes the cardinal points on Horace's anatomical chart of the lyric body. This body is dominated by the head and the various parts of the head (*caput*, 'head'; *frons*, 'forehead'; *oculi*, 'eyes'; *tempora*, 'temples'; *uultus*, 'face' or 'expression'; *supercilia*, 'brow'; etc.) which are the body parts most commonly mentioned in these poems.¹³ And of course the heads of those characters who appear in the *Odes* are never cudgelled, as they would be in the *Sermones*, but are rather constantly being adorned with garlands, perfumes, crowns, and other badges of honour, inspiration, or privilege.¹⁴ So, simply in terms of parts of the body that appear in the two collections, there is a decisive difference—such a

¹⁰ This example shows that bodily vocabulary common to the *Sermones* and the *Odes* cannot be taken as defining a neutral, generically unmarked Horatian body. Rather, the same word in different genres is attracted into the appropriate bodily register.

¹¹ Horace's use of *cauda* in this sense may have been an innovation: see Adams (1982) 36–7.

¹² Bakhtin (1964) 321. Bakhtin is describing 'the new canonical body', which he regards as an early modern innovation. As I have stated previously (note 4 above), I regard the Horatian lyric body as an antecedent of Bakhtin's new canonical body, but one with much closer ties to Bakhtin's universal grotesque body.

¹³ *caput*, 1.4.9, 1.28.20, 2.8.7, 2.13.12, 3.5.42, 3.11.18, 3.24.8 (cf. 1.1.22, the source of a river); *frons*, 1.1.29, 1.7.7, 1.33.5, 2.5.16, 3.13.4, 3.29.16; *vertex*, 1.1.36, 1.18.15, 3.16.19, 3.24.6 (cf. 2.9.22, eddies in a river); *oculi*, 1.3.18, 1.32.11, 1.36.18, 2.2.23, 2.12.15, 3.24.32; *tempora*, 1.7.23, 3.25.20; *supercilia*, 3.1.8.

¹⁴ Cudgels, *Serm.* 1.5.21–3; garlands and crowns, *Carm.* 1.1.29, 1.4.9, 1.7.7, 1.7.23, 1.17.27, 1.26.8, 1.38.2, 2.7.7, 2.7.24, 2.14.17, 3.23.15, 3.25.20, 3.27.30, 3.30.15.16; perfumes, 2.14.17.

difference, in fact, that we should really speak not of the Horatian body, but of two bodies, generically determined: the satiric body of the *Sermones* and the lyric body of the *Odes*.

The differences between these bodies extends not just to the parts of which they consist, but to the character of each body as a whole. Generally, the satiric body is a suffering body, while the lyric body is more frequently a *locus* of pleasure.¹⁵ We see this difference clearly in the opening poems of the two collections, all the more strikingly because the two poems share certain structural and thematic features. *Sermones* 1.1 begins with the conceit of *mempsimoiria*, in which stock figures from various walks of life find their lot wanting in comparison with others: the soldier envies the merchant's lot and vice versa, the farmer and the city-dweller envy each other, and so on (*Serm.* 1.1.1–12). In *Odes* 1.1 this conceit is inverted: we find a similar survey of different walks of life, but with the difference that all the stock figures are basically content (*sunt quos . . . iuuat . . . euehit ad deos* 3–6; *gaudentem patrios findere sarculo | agros* 11–12; *multos castra iuuant* 23).¹⁶ Here then is one of the ways in which the two collections use similar motifs to differentiate themselves from one another. So too with the body. It is in this opening poem that we encounter the first bodily image in the *Sermones* (1.1.4–5), where the soldier's limbs are broken with the constant labour that his job requires:

‘O fortunati mercatores!’ grauis annis
miles ait *multo iam fractus membra labore*.

‘O, those lucky merchants!’ says the soldier, heavy with years, *his limbs now broken with much toil*.

Similarly in the *Odes* the first bodily image that we encounter occurs in the very first poem, once again in a survey of different careers, this time wedged between the examples of the merchant and the soldier; but the image of the body presented here is very different (*Odes* 1.1.19–25):

est qui nec ueteris pocula Massici
nec partem solido demere de die
spernit, *nunc uiridi membra sub arbuto*

¹⁵ I discuss the suffering of the lyric body below, note 22.

¹⁶ Santirocco (1986) 16–17.

stratus, nunc ad aquae lene caput sacrae.
 multos castra iuuant et lituo tubae
 permixtus sonitus bellaque matribus
 detestata.

There is one who thinks it fine to siphon off cups of old Massic wine along with the best part of the day, *his limbs now spread under a verdant arbutus*, now by the gentle source of a sacred spring. Many revel in military camps and the cry of the trumpet and the horn and wars that are hateful to mothers.

Where the soldier's limbs in the first *Sermo* are broken by constant toil, those of the unnamed tippler in the first *Ode* are spread out relaxing in the shade. Each of these passages effectively sets the tone for what follows. The satiric body is one beset by labour, pain, disease, and want, while the lyric body is generally at ease, its needs few and ready to hand.

This example points the way to some further observations about the satiric body: even those parts that it shares with the more noble lyric body are somehow tainted. As Bakhtin writes, 'debasement is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images'.¹⁷ Thus in the *Sermones*, those parts of the body that satire shares with lyric are brought down to the level of the lower organs. Consider the oath that the statue of Priapus takes at the end of *Sermones* 1.8 (37-9):

mentior at siquid, *merdis caput inquiner albis*
corvorum atque *in me veniat mictum atque cacatum*
 Iulius et fragilis Peditia furque Voranus.

If any of what I say is false, *may my head be fouled with white crow shit* and may Julius and fragile Pedita and thieving Voranus *come to piss and crap on me*.

Here the head, the uppermost and hence most prominent and characteristic part of the lyric body, is degraded through contact with those very waste products that emanate from the lower regions of the grotesque body. Similarly in *Sermones* 1.5.22 the head is equated with the *lumbi*, the hips or loins, as an opportune target

¹⁷ Bakhtin (1964) 370.

for punishing blows. Consider as well the eyes. These luminous organs are in the *Odes* emblems of beauty, courage, or good sense;¹⁸ but in the *Sermones* they are primarily undefended areas through which disease may enter and attack the satiric body. Time and again we hear of this or that character as *lippus*, 'blear-eyed', the victim of a malady that was evidently common in antiquity and that is almost emblematic of the *Sermones*.¹⁹

This last point gives rise to another observation: in the *Sermones*, the body is presented as an accurate correlative of the soul. Time and again Horace will develop an argument on the care of the soul by analogy with obvious or commonly accepted truths about the care of the body. The blear-eyed man who does not see properly thus suffers from bodily malady; but he is the analogue of a man who is spiritually distressed and so does not think clearly.²⁰ It is certainly not the case that this similitude between body and soul is ennobling to the former; rather, association with the grotesque body is degrading to the soul, which like the head befouled with excrement is deprived of any lofty status that it might have enjoyed and so is brought back down to earth. A further difference between these two collections lies in the fact that the satiric body is in general not presented as an aesthetic object, whereas the lyric body is constantly aestheticized. In the *Odes*, this is true both of the youthful male body, which occasionally provokes jealousy in the lyric speaker, and of the female body, of which the speaker presents himself as a great connoisseur. In the *Odes*, his appreciation reveals itself primarily through the epithets that adorn various parts of the lyric body.²¹ In the *Sermones*, however, the satirist sounds more like a careful shopper, particularly in poem 2, when he holds forth on the differences between street-walkers and honest *matronae*—the main one being that the *matronae* wear long dresses, so you can't be sure what you are really getting (77–105). The moral: *caueat emptor!*

¹⁸ Beauty: *oculis nigris*, 1.32.11, *oculos fulgentes* 2.12.15; courage: *oculis siccis*, 1.3.18; good sense: *oculo irretorto*, 2.2.23.

¹⁹ *Serm.* 1.1.120, 1.3.25, 1.5.30, 1.5.49, 1.7.3; cf. *Epist.* 1.1.29, 1.2.52.

²⁰ *Serm.* 1.3.25–7.

²¹ e.g. *Telephi* | *certicem roseam*, *cerea Telephi* . . . *bracchia* (1.13.1–2), *Glyceræ nitor* | *splendentis Pario marmore purius* (1.19.5–6).

Not to labour the point, it is fair to distinguish between the *Sermones* and the *Odes* by associating them with two distinct images of the literary body. What I want to do now is move on the next point, which is perhaps more surprising. This is that Horace not only draws generic distinctions among the bodies of minor characters—most of whom exist only in either the *Sermones* or the *Odes*, but not in both collections—but also represents his own body differentially in the two collections in the very same way. This is strange for a simple reason. The fact that Horace repeatedly claims to make events within his own experience the subject of his poetry encourages us to imagine some stable point of reference behind the fictive creations that we read. The poet's life becomes the supposed matrix of his creativity, the source and inspiration of his verse, a sequence of events that, we are encouraged to believe, really did occur. If we accept some such view of the relationship between poetry and experience, we expect the poet's body, at least, to be a relatively stable point of reference. In fact, however, the poet's body is as subject to the vicissitudes of discursive construction as any other factor we may care to name.

Horace's body in the *Sermones*, just like all the other satiric bodies discussed above, is fixed squarely in the realm of the grotesque. It is subject at all times to the same appetites and passions that beset the satiric body in general. It requires constant maintenance. It tends to misbehave and malfunction, suffering from bad digestion, bad eyesight, sexual incontinence, and other afflictions. Just listing these afflictions calls to mind some of the more infamous passages in the *Sermones* and particularly the journey to Brundisium, *Sermones* 1.5. No sooner is this journey underway than something in the water gives Horace an upset stomach, causing him to forgo the dinner that the rest of his travelling companions share (*Serm.* 1.5.7–9). While trying to sleep that night, he is kept awake first by quarrelling, then by mosquitoes and bullfrogs, a serenade, and someone else's snoring (9–19). At the next stop on the journey, Anxur, Horace finds that he has fallen prey to the dreaded malady that is so emblematic of his satiric world and become *lippus*, 'blear-eyed' (27–31). Later he informs the reader that his two ailments prevent him from accompanying Maecenas to some entertainment at Capua (48–9). After further lowjinks we are informed about the most embarrassing episode of the entire trip, the night at Trivicum, when a girl stood Horace up, causing him

to retire late in great frustration and, as a result, to have an erotic dream that ruins his nightshirt and his sleep (82–5).

One should not be too interested in whether any of this really happened. The point is not what Horace's actual body looked like or how well it functioned, but is rather what kind of body Horace chose to inhabit in any particular work. In the *Sermones*, and particularly in the journey to Brundisium in *Sermo* 1.5, he provides himself with a body that is the very image of the grotesque. What then do we expect to find about Horace's body in the *Odes*?

Here as well, Horace supplies himself with a body appropriate to his chosen genre. We do not find Horace's lyric body, like its satiric counterpart, bleary-eyed, beset by erotic dreams, and plagued by gastrointestinal disorders. But Horace's body in the *Odes* is not quite the ideal body, nor is it entirely free of the grotesque characteristics associated with the satiric body in Horace's earlier work. The poet's body feels sexual desire, is growing old, and so forth.²² This treatment by Horace of his own body may be in part a concession to realism—it would have been unwise for a man who reportedly looked like a jug to represent himself as Adonis, in any genre.²³ It is

²² The lyric speaker of the *Odes* suffers from sexual passion and from jealousy (as in *Odes* 1.13.3–4 *meum* | *feruens difficili bile tumet iecur*; cf. 1.19.5 *urit me Glycerae nitor*) as do other characters in the *Odes* (e.g. 1.27.14–16 *quae te cumque domat Venus* | *non erubescendis adurit* | *ignibus*). For the most part, however, the speaker stands at some remove from the more violent effects of passion, which he experiences vicariously and voyeuristically through the affairs of the various young lovers whom he addresses or mentions in the *Odes*. This distinction is made programmatically at the beginning of *Odes* 4 (1.9–12 *tempestiuus in domum* | *Pauli purpureis ales oloribus* | *comissabere Maximi*, | *si torrere iecur quaeris idoneum*). Similarly, the speaker is no longer a youth, and the inevitability of death is a frequent theme in the *Odes*. But while the speaker does not hesitate to remind his addressees that they may die at any time (e.g. *moriture Delli* 2.3.4), death is nevertheless something that he himself has successfully avoided in the past (e.g. his survival of Philippi in 2.7; his nearly being struck by a tree in 2.13) and, significantly, something from which he is at least partially exempt (see below on *Odes* 2.20 and 3.30). In general, the speaker occupies a position that is balanced between the effects of youthful passion on the one hand, and senescence and death on the other. Interestingly, the bodily 'harm' that passion causes men is generally metaphorical in the *Odes* ('roasted' livers and the like), while the suffering thus incurred by the female body is more real (like Lydia's bruises in 1.13). This distinction points to the fact that the relationship between sexuality and bodily debility and senescence operates differently in the case of Horace's male and female characters: see Ancona (1994).

²³ On Horace's appearance see Suetonius, *Vita Horatii* 2, discussed below.

also true, however, that Horace's indulgence of his body's passions is quite moderate in the *Odes*; its needs are represented, as I noted before, as few and easily satisfied. Nor does Horace's lyric body ever place him in the embarrassing situations that we find in the *Sermones*. Nevertheless, Horace's lyric body is not so sharply differentiated from his satiric body as some theorists might lead us to expect. Against these theorists I would again cite Bakhtin, who notes that 'the limited canon [of the ideal body] never prevailed in antique literature. In the official literature of European peoples it has existed only for the last four hundred years.'²⁴ The evidence of the *Odes* vindicates Bakhtin against those more numerous critics who make the Horace of the *Ars poetica* an early theorist of the so-called classical body. When we encounter this classical body, we are not dealing with a theory of the body explicitly derived from an analysis of classical literature, and it is questionable whether the concept even applies to classical literature. Certainly, in Horace what we find is that the lyric body, which can be clearly distinguished, as we have seen, from the satiric body, nevertheless shares with the satiric body several characteristics of the grotesque. And it is to these characteristics, and their development in the *Odes*, that I now want to turn.

In order to understand this development, we must pause to remind ourselves of a rather particular, but widely diffused, aspect of ancient discourse on the body. I refer to the image, extremely common in Antiquity, of the book as a kind of body, and specifically as the body of the author. Since I have addressed this topic before, I will just summarize here a few salient points.²⁵

To begin again with words, it is a notable feature of the vocabulary used to describe the ancient book that many of its terms also denote the body, or parts thereof. For instance, the ancient book itself often came wrapped in a *membrana*—'a piece of parchment', but also of course a 'membrane', a word derived from *membrum*, 'limb'.²⁶ After unwrapping the book, the reader came upon the edge of the papyrus roll, which was called the *frons*—literally, the 'face' or 'brow' of the book. Reading to the end, he would eventually encounter the *umbilicus*, or 'navel'—the rod around which the papyrus roll was wound. Finally, the *umbilicus* probably was decorated at either end by

²⁴ Bakhtin (1964) 321.

²⁵ Farrell (1999).

²⁶ OLD s.v. *membrana*.

cornua or 'horns'. The ancient book, not unlike its modern counterpart with its 'spine', but more obviously so, was a collection of body parts. Moreover, the whole was a body: the Latin word for a collection of book rolls that together form a single work—a collection like *Odes* 1–3, for instance—was, precisely, *corpus*, or 'body'.²⁷

In respect of Horace, I mentioned before in passing that he is supposed to have been shaped like a jug. We learn this from Suetonius in a passage that is thoroughly informed by the idea of an equivalency between an author's body and his book:

habitu corporis fuit brevis atque obesus, qualis et a semet ipso in saturis describitur et ab Augusto hac epistula: 'pertulit ad me Onysius libellum tuum, quem ego ꝑut accusantemꝑ quantuluscumque est boni consulo. uereri autem mihi uideris ne maiores libelli sint quam ipse es. sed tibi satira deest, corpusculum non deest. itaque licebit in sextariolo scribas, quo circuitus uoluminis tui sit ὀγκωδέστερος, sicut est uentriculi tui.'

(Suetonius, *Vita Hor.* 2)

In stature he was short and stout, just as he is described both by himself in his satires and by Augustus in this letter: 'Onysius brought your book to me, and . . . I like it, small as it is. I think you're afraid of your books getting bigger than you are yourself. But you are light in satire, not in weight. You should write on a jug, so that the girth of your scroll will swell up, like that of your belly.'

What I find notable about this passage is not the humour contained in Augustus' joke, but rather the fact that the joke is so lame. Fraenkel in his excellent discussion of this anecdote tries gallantly to defend the princeps' sense of humour, but even he admits that the joke 'may to a modern reader seem somewhat laboured' and concludes that 'in a society not very touchy about personal remarks the witticism might be thought not too bad'.²⁸ Fraenkel may be right, but I think we have to admit that the joke seems very obvious; and this is important because it suggests that the comparison between the author's body and the material form of his writing, which as we have seen could be turned to poetic effect, was also a commonplace of daily conversa-

²⁷ OLD s.v. *corpus* 16a recognizes a definition close to the modern English use of a literary corpus, but misses the more basic meaning that extends to any multi-volume work (*TLL* 4:1020; Birt (1892) 36–43).

²⁸ Fraenkel (1957) 20, 21.

tion. I take this to mean that, however imaginatively Horace or any other poet may have handled the topos, he could count on his readers' being familiar with the general idea, and thus ready and perhaps even eager to find it deployed in subtle and unfamiliar ways.

In the *Sermones*, we find many instances in which the book is connected with, and even represented as, the author's body. In one famous passage, Horace evaluates his predecessor, Lucilius, as a follower of the great poets of Old Comedy (1.4.1–13):

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae
 atque alii quorum comoedia prisca virorum est,
 siquis erat dignus *describi*, quod malus ac fur,
 quod moechus foret aut sicarius aut alioqui
 famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.
 hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus,
 mutatis tantum *pedibus* numerisque, facetus,
 emunctae *naris*, durus componere versus.
 nam fuit hoc vitiosus: in hora saepe ducentos,
 ut magnum, versus dictabat *stans pede in uno*;
 cum flueret lutulentus, erat quod tollere velles;
 garrulus atque piger *scribendi* ferre laborem,
scribendi recte.

The poets Eupolis, Cratinus, Aristophanes, and the others to whom Old Comedy belonged, with great freedom of expression identified anyone who deserved to be marked down as an evildoer or a thief, an adulterer, a murderer, or notorious in some other way. Lucilius depends on them entirely and is their follower, differing only in *feet* and metres, witty, his nose clean, but a rough composer of verses. For this was his besetting sin: in an hour he would dictate two hundred verses, or as many as you like, *standing on one foot*; though he flowed right along in his muddy way, there was what you'd like to cut; he was chatty and too lazy to endure the labour of writing, of writing well.

This passage illustrates a number of points. First, it activates the relationship between the poet's body and the body of his work by playing on the double sense of *pes*.²⁹ Lucilius imitated the comic poets while changing the feet, or metres, in which he wrote; and he was a fluent composer, often producing two hundred verses an hour

²⁹ On this common pun see Barchiesi (1994), 'Appendice: Sull' uso di "piede" in contesti metaletterari', 135–7.

while standing on one foot. Second, lest we miss the point, Lucilius' body is alluded to again in the phrase *emunctae naris*—he was sharp, or 'keen scented' as Niall Rudd puts it.³⁰ But the idea is expressed in a colloquial phrase that means his nose was clean and that belongs firmly to the register of the grotesque body. Finally, note that composing poetry in this passage is closely tied to the business of writing. In fact, it is true throughout the *Sermones*—oddly, perhaps, in view of the conceit that this collection is nothing but a series of 'conversations'—that poets are writers. Horace hints at this point with *describi* in line 3 and then drives it home with the repetition of *scribendi* in lines 12 and 13. The fact that Lucilius dictates his verses is not against this: dictating, which implies that somebody is transcribing what is said, is not the same as singing; and if anything, Lucilius' problem seems to be that he would be a better poet if he would stop dictating (he is called too garrulous, 12), pick up his stylus, and submit to the sheer labour involved in writing well.

This is a point on which Horace insists throughout the *Sermones*: that poetry is a matter of writing books, books that are the correlative of the poet's own body. The point appears with even greater clarity later in this same poem (1.4.53–65):

ergo

non satis est puris versum *perscribere* verbis,
 quem si dissolvas, quivis *stomachetur* eodem
 quo personatus pacto pater. his, ego quae nunc,
 olim quae *scripsit* Lucilius, eripias si
 tempora certa modosque, et quod prius ordine verbum est
 posterius facias praeponens ultima primis,
 non, ut si solvas 'postquam Discordia taetra
 belli ferratos postis portasque refregit',
 inuenias etiam *disiecti membra poetae*.
 hactenus haec: alias, iustum sit necne poema.
 nunc illud tantum quaeram, meritone tibi sit
 suspectum genus hoc *scribendi*.

So it isn't enough *to write out* your verse using correct diction if, should you put them into prose, *would make anyone angry* like a father in a play. If you were to remove the definite rhythms and metres from these things that I now

³⁰ Rudd (1966) 88.

and that Lucilius once *wrote*, and should put the first word last in order and move the last ones earlier, you would not—as you would do if you made prose of ‘after dire Discord battered down the iron lintels and doors of war’—you would not find here as well the *limbs of a dismembered poet*. But enough of that: in another place, I’ll discuss whether something is really poetry. Now what interests me is whether you are right to be suspicious of this genre of *writing*.

In this passage, which has been well discussed by Kirk Freudenburg, Horace goes so far as to describe the poet’s written words, after they have been shuffled, as the ‘limbs of a dismembered poet’—provided the passage you start with is, like the lines of Ennius that he quotes, real poetry to begin with, and not the sort of thing that Horace himself or Lucilius would write.³¹ Finally, in *Sermones* 1.10.64–71, Lucilius appears again as he would be if he had lived in Horace’s day:

fuerit Lucilius, inquam,
 comis et urbanus, fuerit limatior idem
 quam rudis et Graecis intacti carminis auctor
 quamque poetarum seniorum turba; sed ille,
 si foret hoc nostrum fato delapsus in aevum,
 detereret sibi multa, recideret omne quod ultra
 perfectum traheretur, *et in versu faciendo*
saepe caput scaberet vivos et roderet unguis.

I say we admit that Lucilius was agreeable and urbane, and also more polished both than the untaught inventor of a genre that was untouched by the Greeks and than the crowd of elder poets; but if he were to find himself transferred by fate to our time, he would rub out a lot and cut back everything that went beyond what finished work required, *and in making his verse he would often scratch his head and bite his nails to the quick.*

Here we find Lucilius writing in earnest and belabouring his body as he does so—tearing his hair and biting his nails. All these passages show the various ways in which poetry in the *Sermones* means writing books, a process intimately connected to the image of the grotesque body—a body that suffers as it writes, that is metaphorically dismembered when words are rearranged on the page, the various parts of which bear the same names as the parts of the book that it writes.

It is in comparison to this image of the poet’s body in the *Sermones* that we must understand the fate of his lyric body in the *Odes*. Rather

³¹ Freudenburg (1993) 146–9.

than trace this theme in its entirety, we can focus on three crucial moments that outline its development over the three-book collection. Each of these moments represents Horace's body as in a state of change, and thus links it to the grotesque. Not, however, to the grotesque body as it appears in the *Sermones*. The metamorphoses to which Horace subjects his poetic body are also linked to the sublime, culminating in an image that allows the poet to transcend his bodily existence and thus become immortal.

In *Odes* 1.1, Horace states his ambition to enter the canon of lyric poets. He presents this ambition as a matter that is contingent on Maecenas' judgement. The way in which Horace frames this ambition is especially telling: *quodsi me lyricis uatibus inseres | sublimi feriam sidera vertice*, 'And if you place *me* among the lyric bards, I shall strike the stars with my towering *head*' (35–6). Nisbet and Hubbard, citing convincing parallels chiefly from comic genres, explain the concluding image as involving not catasterism but gigantism: Horace grown in stature to gargantuan proportions.³² It is notable that the poet's body forces itself so irresistibly upon the reader's attention in this first poem of the collection. But in addition to the idea implied by 'striking the stars with one's head', there is another bodily image lurking here. Maecenas will express his approval by inserting Horace into the canon of lyric poets. Just how are we to imagine this act? Nisbet and Hubbard compare the verb *inseres* (35) with the Greek ἐγκρίνειν, which they gloss as 'to include among the classics'.³³ But *inseres* seems to hint at something more than the intellectual judgement that Horace is worthy to be counted in the number of Sappho, Alcaeus, and the rest. Does the Latin verb not suggest that Maecenas will actually be placing a book—Horace's book—on a particular shelf or in a particular *capsa*, the one that holds the lyric poets? And when Horace says *quodsi me lyricis uatibus inseres*, 'And if you place *me* among the lyric bards', is he not equating himself with this book? Here Horace identifies himself, his body, with the three-book *corpus* of lyric poetry that he is presenting to his

³² Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 15 ad 1.1.35 *quodsi* (where the image of gigantism is distinguished from that of apotheosis in 1.30 *dis miscent superis*) and 15–16 ad 1.36 *feriam sidera*.

³³ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 15 ad 1.1.35 *inseres*.

patron. With the verb *inseres* he expresses the hope that Maecenas will 'file' him—that is, his *corpus*—along with Sappho and Alcaeus among the *lyricis uatibus*, the acknowledged classics of his chosen genre. The poet's body is equated with his book, and the favourable reception of that book in the eyes of his patron is what will give him the status to which he aspires.³⁴

The image of the book, however, is extremely rare in the *Odes*. In fact, after the opening poem of the collection raises the issue of Horace's reputation by conflating critical judgement with library science, the idea of writing books disappears from the *Odes* almost entirely. When writing does appear, as in poem 1.6 (*Scriberis Vario*), it is connected (again) with the patron's desire for something produced by the poet that he himself can own: a physical book, a presentation copy. And significantly, after the first poem of the collection Horace does not imagine himself as writing at all. Throughout the *Odes*, poetry, and especially Horace's poetry, appears not in the guise of books and writing, but as song, song composed and (usually) performed in the poet's own voice.

This observation brings us to the second transitional moment, the last poem of book 2. Here Horace predicts that he will not die, but instead will experience metamorphosis into a songbird. The conceit is handled humorously: details of the poet's anticipated avian appearance are lovingly recorded, with particular attention given to the rough skin on his legs, the feathers sprouting on his fingers—*iam iam* (9), 'even now', as if it were all happening before our eyes. But I agree with Nisbet and Hubbard that the poem is essentially serious.³⁵ It ends with a command to the reader not to mourn or to erect meaningless monuments to the poet, who will live forever in song; for this is the point of the form that Horace will take, no matter how amusing the grotesque image of this transformation. He will be immortal because his poetry will live as song. Notice, too, what becomes of the patron in light of this change. *non ego quem uocas, dilecte Maecenas, obibo*, 'I shall not die, my dear Maecenas, at your

³⁴ It may also be that Horace's address to Maecenas as *atavis edite regibus* casts the patron too as a kind of book, thus participating in the common strategy of assimilating patron to poet through a shared *tertium comparationis*.

³⁵ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 327–37.

beck and call' (2.20.67).³⁶ Horace's transformation into a songbird signifies transcendence of all those forces that place him at the whim of his patron. To leave behind his bodily form is to win freedom from such obligations. The distance between this ode and the opening poem of the collection is thus considerable. No longer does Horace's poetic immortality depend on his patron's decision to place a book in a particular *capsa*, nor is this transformation, like the earlier one into a colossus, contingent on another's judgement: here Horace asserts that he will live forever not as a working writer, but as a songbird, free of all former constraints.

By the end of *Odes* 3, the developments that I have traced from poem 1.1 to poem 2.20 reach their fruition. Maecenas is relegated to the last ode but one, where Horace speaks as a sage rather than a dependent; Zetzl and Santirocco have made clear the implications of this arrangement.³⁷ The poet reserves the final ode, the place of honour, all to himself. He speaks of his poetry no longer as a body of book rolls, but as a monument more lasting than bronze: a monument that will endure forever. This image, in which Horace's monument is compared to the pyramids, at first seems grossly material in its orientation. Horace invites this mistaken reading, but forces us to correct ourselves. His monument will last not because it is more substantial than bronze, but because it is less so—indeed, because it is entirely insubstantial. Along with the patron the book disappears as well. Horace's poetry will last forever not because it is inscribed on any more or less durable material, but because it—or 'he'—will be sung (*dicar* 3.30.10) forever.

The trajectory that takes us from the image of the poet as client to that of the poet as utterly independent and almost immortal (*non omnis moriar*, 3.30.6) is thus paralleled by one that takes us from the image of the poem as book to that of the poem as song. There is a second parallel that involves the poet's transcendence of his bodily state. When working in the 'lower' genres—the *Satires*, *Epodes*, and *Epistles*—Horace repeatedly insists that he is not writing poetry at all. At the same time, his body is a very inconvenient thing. It requires

³⁶ 'vocas implies a social inferiority' (Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 340, *ad* 2.20.6 *quem vocas*, with convincing replies to other interpretations).

³⁷ Zetzl (1982), Santirocco (1984).

feeding, exercise, and various other sorts of animal attention. It misbehaves; it is by turns fat, flatulent, incontinent, impotent, subject in short to all the maladies that actual bodies occasionally experience, only a bit more so. In the *Odes*, however, the poet's body is much better behaved and certainly less obtrusive than in the 'lower' genres. Over the course of *Odes* 1–3 we can even observe how the body is sublimated through metamorphosis into preferable, more dignified metaphorical forms. This development is predicted in poem 1.1 when Horace equates his acknowledgement as a lyric poet with the motif of bodily transformation. We find it again at the end of Book 2, where Horace playfully imagines his waxing reputation via bodily metamorphosis into the form of a bird. Finally, at the end of the *Odes* the poet's body disappears altogether, giving place to a successor that is entirely insubstantial: the disembodied voice that will pronounce Horace's poetry after his bodily death and down through the ages.

To recapitulate: my first point is simply that the image of the body that we encounter in Book 1 of the *Sermones* differs sharply from the one that we find in the first three books of *Odes*. This difference appears clearly in the very different sets of body parts that Horace sees fit to name in the two collections. The satiric body is dominated by the bowels, the reproductive organs, and the excretory system, whereas the lyric body consists mainly of the head. But (my second point) Horace's lyric body is not consistent with the so-called classical body, which some modern theorists have derived from his comments in the *Ars poetica*. Rather, the lyric body of the *Odes* retains an affinity with what these theorists call the grotesque body, an affinity strong enough to permit Horace to develop the image of his own body throughout the *Odes* in some remarkable ways. This development takes us from the truly grotesque image of the poet's gigantic body in *Odes* 1.1 to that of a body that has evanesced in *Odes* 3.30. My third point is that this trajectory parallels one that moves from physical text to insubstantial song: for in *Odes* 1.1 Horace imagines his collection as so many books on Maecenas' shelves, whereas in 3.30 it exists forever in *viva voce* performance. We may conclude from these three points that Horace's poetry as a whole partakes in a discourse of materiality that associates the material with lower genres like satire, and that represents the higher

forms, like lyric, as capable of transcending the limitations of the familiar, material world. This is true whether we speak primarily of Horace's bodies or of his books. And so what began as a simple exercise in counting words takes us by steps to some rather large conclusions about Horace's strategy for claiming the status of a poet for all time.

Classical Constructions

*Papers in Memory of Don Fowler, Classicist
and Epicurean*

Edited by

S. J. HEYWORTH with

P. G. FOWLER and S. J. HARRISON

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PA
26
F68
C58
2007

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford ox2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

© Oxford University Press 2007

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

Typeset by SPI Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India
Printed in Great Britain
on acid-free paper by
Biddles Ltd., King's Lynn, Norfolk

ISBN 978-0-19-921803-5

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

UNIVERSITY
OF
PENNSYLVANIA
LIBRARIES