John Donne Journal
Vol. 27 (2008)

Donne's Horatian Means: Horatian Hexameter Verse in Donne's *Satyres* and *Epistles*

Victoria Moul

Horace's hexameter verse—two collections of *Satires*, two of *Epistles* and the *Ars Poetica*—remain, like Donne's satires and epistles, less fashionable both in teaching and scholarship than their author's lyric work. The relationship between Donne's *Satyres* and those of Horace (and Horace's imitator, Persius), is well-established in criticism, but there has been little attempt to relate Donne's verse epistles to Horatian forms.[1] This is despite the fact that in Horace's own work the distinction between satire and epistle is more porous than modern editions and criticism would suggest—both are described as "sermones" ("speeches")[2]—and the verse collections of Donne's contemporaries frequently exhibit a similar "mixed" approach: even the most archetypally "satiric" collections of the 1590s typically also included epistolary poetry, and sometimes epigrams.[3]

---

[1]A recent and informative exception to this is Gregory Kneidel, "Religious Criticism, the Verse Epistle, and Donne's Daring Discretion," *Christianity and Literature* 55 (2005): 27–50.

[2]Horace describes his genre as "sermo" at *Satires* I.4.48, I.10.11 and 23, II.2.2, II.4.9; *Epistles* II.1.4, II.1.250. The term is borrowed from Lucilius. In contrast, the word "satira" appears only twice (*Satires* II.1.1 and II. 6. 17).

[3]Eight epistles appear alongside satires in Lodge's 1595 volume, *A Fig for Momus: Containing Pleasant varietie, included in Satyres, Eclgues, and Epistles* (London: Clement Knight, 1595), 4°, STC (2nd ed.)/16658). Guilpin's collection *Skialethia* (1598) contains both satires and epigrams. Jonson wrote no

This article is an attempt to read three apparently very different poems—Donne's well-known first satire, an occasional piece printed in the prefatory material to Thomas Coryat's *Crudities*, and a short epistle addressed to Roland Woodward—in the light of this broadened sense of the scope and flexibility of Horatian hexameter. I want to suggest not only that all three of these poems are involved in an imitative relationship with key Horatian texts (and those of Persius) more complex and interesting than has previously been noted; but also that Donne uses Horace's exploration of poetic and social choices (of genre, of subject, of address) to animate the religiously-inflected drama and narrative of his own "hexameter" voice.

In her excellent article on Marlowe, Marjorie Garber uses the phrase, taken from *Doctor Faustus*, "infinite riches in a little room," to catch at the formulations of confinement—of the stage, the study, the magical circle, and finally of the limitations of language itself—that pervade Marlowe's work.[4] The "little room" of Faustus's study, replete with learning, containing the world, is also where Donne's first satire begins:

> Away thou fondling motley humorist,
> Leave mee, and in this standing woodden chest,
> Consorted with these few bookes, let me lye
> In prison, and here be coffin'd, when I dye;
> Here are Gods conduits, grave Divines; and here
> Natures Secretary, the Philosopher;
> And jolly Statesmen, which teach how to tie
> The sinewes of a cities mistique bodie;
> Here gathering Chroniclers, and by them stand
> Giddie fantastique Poëts of each land.

---

poems entitled "satire," but his most accomplished satiric passages are to be found in his impressive Horatian verse epistles.

[4]Garber, "'Infinite Riches in a Little Room': Closure and Enclosure in Marlowe," in *Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson*, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 13. Garber does not, though she might pertinently have done so, add death and the coffin to this list.

> Shall I leave all this constant company,
> And follow headlong, wild uncertaine thee?"
> (*Satyre I*, 1–12)[5]

The movement of this sentence (which is far from over yet, as we shall see) takes us from a broadly positive gesture of retirement to death itself, a death entrapped and imprisoned. The detail of a "standing" chest suggests the body-as-artefact, and the chest-study then becomes a space in which one may "lie," but any restful connotations are quickly challenged: here one can "lie / In prison" and finally "be coffined, when I die."[6] If we removed the phrase "consorted with these few books," we might be reading about embodiment or incarnation itself—the "standing wooden chest" to which the speaker is both loyal, and necessarily confined.[7] The tone of these lines, blending attraction to the life of study with a melodramatic sense of its limit and oppression, establishes the distinctive youthful voice of the satirist, reproaching his companion, who is implicitly dismissed in favor of "consort" with his books and their authors, but nevertheless tempted, even in these earliest lines, by the possibility of alternative pursuits.

The charm and skill in characterization should not, however, blind us to the literary associations of this passage, especially given the novel boldness of the generic self-identification as "satyres."[8] These "few books," sufficient companion for the poet until such time as he should die, begin where Horace's *Epistles* I.18 ends:

---

[5]All quotations of Donne are taken from W. Milgate, ed., *The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) and will be cited parenthetically.

[6]In his reading of these lines, Joshua Scodel points out that "chest" at this period could also itself mean "coffin" ("'None's Slave': Some Versions of Liberty in Donne's Satires 1 and 4," *ELH* 72 [2005]: 369).

[7]Milgate notes the probable reference here to the recently-refitted studies at Lincoln's Inn (p. 118).

[8]Milgate remarks: "here for the first time in English is a sustained 'imitation' of a Latin genre . . . we have to a striking degree the absorption of the general methods of Roman satire into an essentially original and individual way of writing; Donne validates anew the modes of approach and the techniques of the ancient satirists" (p. xvii–xviii).

When I am downe at hackney brooke and tast
of the cold ryvolett; of whose free wast
all the poore Clownage of Lowlayton drinckes;
that curld and frozen village: what then thinckes
My frind, I meditate, or most doe crave?
that I maie but possesse what now I haue
Or, at the gods will, lesse; That I may liue
vnto my selfe, the remnant doth surviue
of my short age: if ought surviving be,
through their benevolence, that I maie see
plenty of bookes about mee, and fitt store
for my provision yearelie, and no more:
Least elce, with doubtfull hopes, I wavering sway
but it sufficient is, I only pray
To Ioue, who giues, and takes, for lief and welth
My constant mynde, I will prepare my selfe.[9]

Here the supply of books is a key element in a vision of peaceful Stoic retreat from the vagaries of public life (and in particular from the

[9]This translation demands some comment; it is found in two closely related manuscripts, MS Bodleian Rawlinson Poetry 31, ff. 242^{r}–243^{r} and British Library Harley 4064, ff. 16^{v}–18^{r}. Both date from between 1620 and 1633 and include poems by Donne and Jonson among others of their circle; both are anonymously compiled by professional scribes. Although neither manuscript is simply a reduced version of the other (since both contain poems the other does not include), they are clearly closely related. In particular, those poems which they do share (forty-seven in total) appear, without exception, in the same order in both manuscripts. The translation of *Epistles* I.18 runs from line 67 of the Latin until the end of the poem; the two versions are very close. My transcription is of that found in MS BL Harley 4064; I have preserved the spelling, punctuation and capitalization of the original, but I have not reproduced certain peculiarities of indentation, or scribal corrections. Although anonymous, it bears several points of comparison with Jonson's extant verse (as well as his translation style) and may be his; it can certainly be attributed to the circle of which he and Donne were a part. Although as yet unpublished, I understand that it is to be included under doubtful attributions in the forthcoming Cambridge edition of Jonson's work. The use of "constant" to translate "aequum animum" in the final line of the poem is particularly resonant in the context of Donne's first satire. I am grateful to Colin Burrow for first alerting me to the existence of this translation.

constant vigilance required in the successful cultivation of a patron, the main topic of the poem). Donne's books are described by genre in terms of the profession of their authors, "grave Divines" (5), "the Philosopher" (6), "jolly Statesmen" (7), "gathering Chroniclers" (9), and finally "[g]iddie fantastique Poëts" (10); the poet would rather "consort" with these virtual companions than with the "humorist" he is trying to dismiss. Books as companions are, moreover, a key feature of Roman satire, familiar from Horace's programmatic first satire of his second book:

> quid faciam? saltat Milonius, ut semel icto
> accessit fervor capiti numerusque lucernis;
> Castor gaudet equis, ovo prognatus eodem
> pugnis; quot capitum vivunt, totidem studiorum
> milia: me pedibus delectat claudere verba
> Lucili ritu nostrum melioris utroque.
> ille velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim
> credebat libris, neque si male cesserat usquam
> decurrens alio, neque si bene. . . .
> (*Satires* II.1.24–32)[10]

> [What can I do? Milonius leaps around when the heat reaches his dumb-struck brain, and the number of the lamps increases; Castor delights in horses, his brother born from the same egg takes his pleasure in boxing. A thousand men alive have a thousand different interests: as for me, I take my pleasure in enclosing words in feet, in the style of Lucilius, a better man than us both. He used to entrust his secrets to his loyal companions, his books; and he would never turn to anyone else, whether things went well or ill.]

This passage includes a compressed kind of priamel—a list of others' choices of pleasure and occupation, culminating with the speaker's own: that is, poetry. This structural element is combined with a specific

[10]Latin quotations are taken from the Oxford Classical Text editions of Horace (*Q. Horati Flacci Opera*, ed. Edward C. Wickham [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901]) and Persius (*A. Persi Flacci et D. Iuni Iuvenalis Saturae*, ed. W. V. Clausen, rev. ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992]). Translations of Latin are my own unless (as above) otherwise noted.

declaration of genre, in this case of satire, in the style of Lucilius, whose work is now almost entirely lost.[11] Both the first book of Horace's *Odes* and the first book of his *Satires* begin with a version of the priamel motif. In *Odes* I.1 the poet lists a variety of careers (Olympic glory, political distinction, merchant wealth, and so on), most of which are suggestive of associated genres, before announcing his own lofty and even semi-divine calling as a lyric poet. The first of Horace's *Satires* is a kind of inversion of this topos: each of the representatives of possible paths—the merchant, the soldier, the lawyer, the farmer—are all alike discontent with their lot and envious of each other, but driven relentlessly to acquire yet more wealth. The satirist, apparently at one remove, advises us (as in *Epistles* I.18) to be content with what we have, although his own vulnerability to this same kind of restless dissatisfaction is soon revealed.

In the opening lines of Donne's first satire the "parade" of writers, in descending order of generic status, creates an original but recognizable version of this priamel motif, and one particularly appropriate, as we have seen, to the first poem of a new genre with links to Horace. On this model, we expect the theology, philosophy, politics, and history, for all their undoubted worth, to be rejected by the speaker in favor of his own calling to (satiric) poetry. Instead, the "giddie fantastique Poëts" (10) are also apparently dismissed as (ironically) a component of the "constant company" (11) of learning from which the speaker is tempted to escape. The basic shape of the dilemma is described by Joshua Scodel as "[a]mbivalence about Stoic freedom in retirement."[12] The instability of the humorist's proto-typical lust and greed is matched by the speaker's own more subtle, but no less compelling, uncertainty: he does not know whether to choose the retired life of study and contemplation, or to go, literally and metaphorically, "out into the world."

But the place of *poetry* in this description is noticeably liminal: it is the last of the types of book in his study, which seem to descend in order, broadly, of moral seriousness as well as generic esteem. Moreover, these poets are, confusingly, "giddie" characters who nevertheless "stand"

---

[11]Compare Persius, *Satires* I.119–121; the poet, who longs to tell his secret, asks: "Is it wicked for me to mutter? not even in secret? not even to a ditch? never? / Well, I'll bury it here. I've seen it, I've seen it myself, little book: / Doesn't everyone have the ears of an ass?"

[12]Scodel, "'None's slave,'" p. 369.

alongside the chroniclers, and who for all their apparent instability are included in the question: "Shall I leave all this constant company, / And follow headlong, wild uncertaine thee?" (11–12). "Headlong"—"praeceps"—is never a good word in Latin poetry, associated generally with unmanly passion and the disaster of sudden collapse. In Persius's *Satires* III, the word itself stands for the act of ceding to sin: "imus / imus praecipites" (41–42), "we're going, we're going headlong." That "imus" resonates in Donne's line, which reads, simultaneously, as suggesting that the speaker might follow "thee," the humorist, who is both wild and headlong; or else that he, the speaker, will himself be "headlong" in his following of "thee." The agency of the question "[s]hall I . . . follow" is itself undermined by the sudden collapse of control.[13]

The opening twelve lines of Donne's first satire outline two overlapping questions of choice: of lifestyle (studious Stoic retreat or the risks of social engagement), and of the genres and modes of authorship. Both of these questions are rooted in the patterns and preoccupations of classical satire, a genre noted for its programmatic concern with its own purpose and justification.[14] What kind of poem, then, is this poem about the instability of poetry? What kind of verse (or life) can avoid giddiness and fantasy while remaining poetic; and how can the stability of Stoic retirement emerge for the poet who finally decides: "loe / I shut my chamber doore, and 'Come, lets goe'" (51–52)?

The answer is not to be found, as we might expect from reading Horace, simply in the generic shift into a satiric voice. Rather, the first mention of the poet's success in "staying"—as opposed to his fruitless

[13]The critical consensus is that this poem, like the fourth satire, is in some sense "modelled" on Horace *Satires* I.9, but that seems to me unconvincing: neither the structure nor the plot are similar, and this much "weaker" version undermines the bravura creativity of the undoubted imitation—and extension—of *Satires* I.9 that is Donne's fourth satire. The repetition of this relationship between I.9 and Donne's first satire as received wisdom has I think distorted our appreciation of the tenderness and humor of *Satyre I.*

[14]See for instance Horace *Satires* I.1, I.10 and II.1; Juvenal *Satires* 1 and 7 and Persius *Satires* 1. The satire of the 1590s shows the same preoccupation, both in its verse and dramatic forms (compare for instance the Induction to Jonson's "satirical comedy" *Every Man Out of his Humour* [1599] and the *Apologetical Dialogue* to *Poetaster* [1601]).

request "[s]tand still" at line 86—is in his Christian (indeed, literally, if humorously, Christ-like) care for his "motley" friend:

> He heares not mee, but, on the other side
> A many-colour'd Peacock having spide,
> Leaves him and mee; I for my lost sheep stay;
> He followes, overtakes, goes on the way, . . .
> (91–94)[15]

The speaker is ultimately rewarded for his concern; it is to him that his erratic friend finally returns: "Directly [he] came to mee hanging the head, / And constantly a while must keepe his bed" (111–112), wittily the humorist's first moment of "constancy" in the poem. The speaker of the poem abandons one kind of claustrophobic stability only to find, amidst the "giddiness," another. The poet's friend is undoubtedly sinful (as well as funny); but it is in "staying" for him—not by remaining at home—that the poet behaves as a Christian.[16] The poem, like its speaker,

---

[15]The love of God, or of Jesus, for his people is often compared to that of a shepherd for his flock; the most pertinent references are to Isaiah 5:36 (one of the chapters most frequently cited as prophecy of Christ's sacrifice): "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"; Matthew 10:5–6: "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; and Matthew 18:12: "How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" Jesus declares himself the good shepherd at John 10:14. (Biblical citations throughout are to the Authorized Version.)

[16]On this point I differ from several influential readings of the poem which focus rather upon the satirist's own sinfullness in leaving his study. See, for instance, James S. Baumlin, "Generic Contexts of Elizabethan Satire: Rhetoric, Poetic Theory, and Imitation," in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 459–466, and Eddy Y. Shikany and Daniel P. Jaeckle, "Donne's 'Satyre I': The Influence of Persius's 'Satire III,'" *SEL* 21 (1981): 111–122. My interpretation of the poem is closest to that offered by M. Thomas Hester, *Kinde Pitty and Brave Scorn: John Donne's Satyres* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982), pp. 17–32.

is trying to find a point of stability amidst "vanities, and giddinesses" (51) whether moral or aesthetic: a stance, in the fullest meaning of the word, that engages with the world, that finds a place for poetry without succumbing to sin.

Just before making his final decision to follow his "motley humorist" out into the city, the speaker relates man's fall, his awareness of his own nakedness, and the resulting invention of clothing. Adam's "beasts skin" (46) is transformed, over the line break, from human clothing to the base realities of incarnation itself: "And in this course attire, which I now weare, / With God, and with the Muses I conferre" (47–48). The religious seriousness of the poem is real; but so too is its commitment to its art: the poet faces both his God and his Muse.[17] The poet, and the poem, step from the study into the "world" of satire; the poem announces a new generic project just as surely as the opening poems of Horace's own collections, but the poetic mode it heralds is specifically *Christian* as well as generally ethical.

Donne's *Satyres*, then, begin with a motif, derived from Horace, alerting us to the necessity of poetic *choice*: the choice of genre, the choice of companions (literal and metaphorical), the choice of ethical model and, finally, the choices of religion (the theme, most explicitly, of the third satire). The "motley humorist" of the first satire, the bad poets and (worse) lawyers of the second, the dogmatic allegiances or failures of allegiance of the third are all instances of ill-choices, or the failure to choose—to discern—at all; while the fourth and fifth continue to explore the shape and function of the satirist's own choice.[18]

The enormity of sin and corruption in all these poems—whether of sexuality, religious mania, or legal language—is accordingly rooted in the *failure* to choose. The limitless variety and undiscerning inclusiveness of sin, the sheer extremity of each satiric vision is reflected in the tumbling

[17]The insistence here upon the poet's ability to reconcile these two forces has some points in common with Donne's noticeably independent conception of the 'mean'. This issue is well explored by Scodel, "The Medium is the Message: Donne's 'Satire 3,' 'To Sir Henry Wotton' (Sir, More Than Kisses), and the Ideologies of the Mean," *Modern Philology* 90 (1993): 479–511.

[18]Emory Elliott notes: "From a moral standpoint, the poems are about the dilemma of the Christian humanist; from a literary standpoint they are about the problem of satire as a poetic form" ("The Narrative and Allusive Unity of Donne's *Satyres*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 [1976]: 110).

density of the verse itself: "This thing hath travail'd, and saith, speakes all tongues, / And only know'th what to all States belongs" (*Satyre IV*, 35–36). Language that is entirely inclusive and absorbent can mean anything, and so risks meaning nothing. The satirist's particular task, morally and poetically, is to resist this, and his integrity consists in that act of resistance:

> [I] felt my selfe then
> Becomming Traytor, and mee thought I saw
> One of our Giant Statutes ope his jaw
> To sucke me in. . . .
> (*Satyre IV*, 130–133)

In contrast to the corruption and failure of autonomy of the poets and lawyers he attacks, the poet claims "my words none drawes / Within the vast reach of th'huge statute lawes" (*Satyre II*, 111–112), and the doubleness of the line is important: his words, he claims, are not responsible (unlike those of lawyers) for prosecuting others under the vast rubric of the threatening statutes; but equally, no-one can draw *these* words, his own poetry, into the devouring sway of legal language.[19]

I want to turn now to a much less celebrated poem, Donne's dedicatory verse for Thomas Coryate's *Crudities* (1611), in the light of this connection between undiscerning enormity, the obligation—moral, religious, and artistic—to choose, and the formal context of Horatian hexameter verse.[20]

* * * *

[19]The play upon language-as-poetry and language-as-legal-medium is also central to Horace's *Satires* II.1.

[20]*Coryats Crudities Hastily gobbled up in five Moneths travells in France, Sauoy, Italy, Rhetia commonly called the Grisens country, Heluetia alias Switzerland, some parts of high Germany, and the Netherlands; Newly digested in the hungry aire of ODCOMBE in the County of Somerset, & now dispersed to the nourishment of the trauelling Members of this Kingdome* (1611). Donne's poem is at d3^{r}–d4^{r}. See also Michael Strachan's entry on Coryate in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6364>).

The rather extraordinary work for which Donne's poem is one of many dedicatory verses is an account of Thomas Coryate's travels on the continent during the first decade of the seventeenth century, and an invitation and encouragement for other Englishmen to emulate him. Of enormous length (at 477 pages), the vast folio incorporates, amidst the narrative, illustrations and factual data such as prices and exchange rates as well as lengthy historical and descriptive passages of interest. The extensive prefatory material includes around sixty dedicatory poems, some straightforwardly panegyric, many of them firmly tongue-in-cheek, including verses by most of the literary men of the day. Donne begins his poem, titled simply *Upon Mr Thomas Coryats Crudities*:

> Oh to what heighth will love of greatnesse drive
> Thy leaven'd spirit, *Sesqui-superlative*?
> (1–2)

These lines introduce the central pun of the poem, which conflates the "greatnesse"—the size, reach, and scope—of a major work with what is literally outsize, unnecessarily enormous, and unwieldy. This "love of greatnesse" is love of great achievement, of success; but also a craving for sheer bulk in the form of the comic enormity and self-importance of Coryate's book. Moreover, it is "leaven'd": leaven or yeast added to dough makes it swell with air. Bread dough, like Coryate's spirit, is literally "puffed up," but the absurdity is compounded. It is not a physical object such as Coryate's body or even his book that is "leaven'd" but his "spirit," a word itself meaning air or breath: Coryate's soul is air filled with air.[21]

But I want to focus upon the resonance of the pleasing coinage, "sesqui-superlative." Milgate glosses "a superlative and a half," and this is obviously correct; the Latin prefix means "– and a half."[22] The *OED* tells us that in English usage, as in Latin, it is compounded with words for a measure or quantity to express "this measure and a half again," as in

[21]Compare Jonson, *An Epistle to a Friend, to Persuade Him to the Wars*: "The whole world here leaven'd with madnesse swells; / And being a thing, blowne out of nought, rebells / Against his Maker" (31–33). (Jonson's poetry is quoted from *The Poems. The Prose Works*, vol. 8 of C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1952]).

[22]Milgate, p. 192.

"sesquitone" or "sesquihoral." With the exception of a musical example ("sesquiquarta," a technical term for a particular harmonic interval), these instances all post-date Donne's poem. In fact, the *OED* cites Donne's lines as exemplifying a further use of the prefix, quite distinct from the other usages concerned with measurement of one kind of another. The definition given for this meaning is:

> sesqui-, 1d (obsolete)
> **d.** Prefixed to words descriptive of forms of religious belief, = extreme(ly), excessive(ly), ultra-; e.g. ***sesqui-conformist***, ***-deist***, ***-heretic***, ***-Jesuit***, ***separation***; also ***sesqui-superlative*** adj. *Obs.*

The *OED* gives several examples:

> ***a*1661** FULLER *Worthies, Glouc.* (1662) I. 360 Some pressed super-Canonical Ceremonies, and such *Sesqui-Conformists made Mr. Workman turn first but a Semi-Conformist, and then by degrees to renounce all Conformity.
> **1880** F. HALL *Doctor Indoctus* 52 If he invented a brand-new form of allotheism, and came out a *sesquideist, or a quaternitarian.
> **1627** DONNE *Serm.* i. (1649) II. 5 They are *se[s]qui-Heretiks in this, that they countenance Incontinency, and Fornication, which those very heretiks abhorred.
> ***a*1631** *Serm.* xii. (1640) 113 A Jesuit, or a Semi-Jesuit, a practising Papist, or a *Sesqui-Jesuit, a Jesuited Lady.
> **1653** R. BAILLIE *Dissuas. Vind.* (1655) 9 Why . . . do the Independents . . . runne beyond it . . . to a *sesqui-separation?
> **1611** DONNE *Poems, Upon Coryat's Crudities* 2 Oh, to what height will love of greatness drive Thy learned spirit, *sesqui-superlative!

There are several things we might observe about these instances. First, that Donne's poem here under consideration is the earliest example; second, that the two subsequent are also from Donne, in this case his sermons. Third, this poem upon Coryate's work, the earliest of the

examples given, is not in fact a very clear instance of the definition offered. In the context of the other citations, we may be convinced that "sesqui-superlative" even in the Coryate poem has a specifically religious connotation; but the quotation alone is unpersuasive. The only arguably "religious" term in these lines (or indeed those that follow) is "spirit"; in context, as we have seen, that term is absurdly weakened by the juxtaposition with "leaven'd" (although the text used by *OED* does not record this reading, but the feebler and less funny, but plausible scribal corruption, "learned").

It seems, then, not impossible both that Donne's use of the term here is the first use of the prefix compounded with a word which is not one of size or measure; and also that the subsidiary association specifically of *religious* excess (and therefore of a religious target of satire) is also to be attributed to him. What, then, can we make of the scope and force of this first usage? The Coryate poem is accomplished mock-panegyric, of deft humor and witty transitions; it has various points in common with other major pieces of mock-panegyric and literary criticism in verse, especially by Jonson, of around the same period, and appears in the prefatory material to Coryate's book as one of many commendatory poems (some more sincere than others; but this one of the funniest). But it is scarcely a religious piece. As I hope to show, this earliest example of what was to become a term of specifically religious invective has its allusive roots in Latin satire aimed at stylistic excess: in Donne, as in Horace, failures of choice and judgment in aesthetic and ethical matters are closely associated with one another.

The poem is, as we have already observed, centrally concerned with literary style: the scale of Coryate's work is imagined literally ("Infinite worke," 9) as a comment upon its stylistic enormity. It is significant, then, that the memorable noun "sesquipes" and its related adjective "sesquipedalis" occur in Horace's *Ars Poetica* specifically in the context of egregious literary style. In Horace the word is found in a passage of the *Ars Poetica* on inflated tragic bombast:

> singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decenter.
> . . . . . .
> et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri
> Telephus et Peleus, cum pauper et exsul uterque

> proicit ampullas et sesquipedalia verba,
> si curat cor spectantis tetigisse querela.
> (*Ars Poetica*, 92, 94–98)
>
> [Each individual thing should keep its place once it's been appropriately alotted
> . . . . . .
> often a tragic actor grieves in everyday language [that is: in the register of satire; speech that goes by foot]
> Telephus and Peleus, one a beggar the other an exile,
> lay it on thick and splash around their foot-and-a-half-foot words,
> if they hope to touch the heart of their audience with their lament.]

"Sesquipedalia" is of course an example of the phenomenon it denotes: a grand and overblown word for grand and overblown language; literally, in fact, the kind of word that takes up at least a foot-and-a-half (actually two metrical feet in this passage). Coryate's prose style is over-the-top in a similar way, and Jonson's *Character* of Coryate makes a point of just this feature: "He is a great and bold *Carpenter* of words, or (to expresse him in one like his owne) a *Logodaedale*."[23] The creative importation of elaborate classically-derived compounds into English—as in "Logodaedale" and "sesqui-superlative"—mimics the author's own distinctive register.

But the passage of Horace is not the only precedent for the word; Persius, and then Martial, borrow it, again in firmly satiric contexts. In Persius's first satire the word denotes not stylistic excess but literal, physical obesity: Persius has typically transferred Horace's suggestion of stylistic enormity to the physical body of his target.[24] He is writing of false praise accorded to one's patron, especially the false praise of feeble poetry—an instance of insincerity and bad faith both personal and aesthetic.

---

[23] *Coryats Crudities* (1611), B3^{v}.

[24] Kirk Freudenburg remarks: "The world of P. I is bloated with images of bodies in various states of distress" (*Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p. 173), and pervasive physical imagery is a distinctive feature of Persius's style.

sed recti finemque extremumque esse recuso
'euge' tuum et 'belle.' nam 'belle' hoc excute totum:
quid non intus habet? non hic est Ilias Atti
ebria veratro? non siqua elegidia crudi
dictarunt proceres? non quidquid denique lectis
scribitur in citreis? calidum scis ponere sumen,
scis comitem horridulum trita donare lacerna,
et 'verum' inquis 'amo, verum mihi dicite de me.'
qui pote? vis dicam? nugaris, cum tibi, calve,
pinguis aqualiculus propenso sesquipede extet.
(48–58)

[But I'll deny that your "bravo" and "lovely" are the limit and end
of what's correct. For shake out the whole of that "lovely":
what's not inside? Isn't there Attius's *Iliad*
drunk on hellebore? Aren't there some little elegies the dyspeptic
nobles keep saying off the top of their heads? Isn't there in fact
whatever
is written out on couches of citron wood? You know how it's done: how
to serve a cow's udders,
you know how to give a threadbare cloak to a shivering "companion,"
and you say "the truth—that's what I love; tell me the truth about
myself."
How can he? Would you like me to say it? You spout nothings,
although, baldy,
your fat pot-belly sticks out by a good foot-and-a-half.]

Persius is now rather unfashionable and little read. In Donne's day, although notorious for the difficulty of his language, he was routinely published in combined editions with Juvenal's *Satires*, and several commentaries existed. James S. Baumlin considers Donne "the only Elizabethan to imitate Persius successfully—to draw on his moral seriousness and tendency to philosophize, and make effective use of his structural and stylistic devices."[25] Persius's style is both very dense and

[25]Baumlin, p. 450. Ben Jonson appreciated (and imitated) Donne's appropriation of Persius; one of Jonson's epigrams to Donne (*Epigrams* 98) alludes to Persius's second satire and its birthday dedication to Macrinus: "Read all I send: and, if I find but one / Marked by thy hand, and with the better stone, / My title's sealed" (7-9); compare the opening of Persius's second satire: "hunc, Macrine, diem numera meliore lapillo, / qui tibi labentis apponit

fragmentary, typically consisting, as here, of a series of swift transitions between complex metaphors; it is also densely allusive, especially to Horace. As in Horace, the term "sesquipedes" is here associated with poor literary taste; the speaker refuses to praise worthless poetry, but inverts the terms of possible (albeit ironic) grandeur and range and applies them to the patron's physical self.[26]

From these examples we suspect that "sesqui-superlative" is a satirical coinage; also that it alerts us to satire aimed at literary *style* in particular; and finally, that the sincerity (or otherwise) of the praise is particularly under question. The move from the book's "greatnesse" to its physical size—the central joke of Donne's entire poem, as its many leaves supply an almost endless range of uses—is similar to Persius's literal-minded transferral.

Moreover, earlier in Persius's first satire the speaker of the poem criticizes his interlocutor, apparently a long-winded but artistically bankrupt poet of noble class who enjoys reading in public, for deriving such pleasure from performance, regardless of the quality of his audience, and for taking no pleasure in knowledge except in so far as he is publicly *seen* to be knowledgeable ("en pallor seniumque! o mores, usque adeone / scire tuum nihil est nisi te scire hoc sciat alter?," 26–27). The poet replies in lines 24–25 with an image of "leavening":

> tun, vetule, auriculis alienis colligis escas,
> auriculis quibus et dicas cute perditus 'ohe'?
> 'quo didicisse, nisi hoc fermentum et quae semel intus
> innata est rupto iecore exierit caprificus?'
>
> (22–25)[27]

---

candidus annos." The *Prologue* to Persius's *Satires* was one of Jonson's favorite passages, frequently alluded to in his work.

[26]The word is also found in Catullus 97.5, used more literally to describe especially long teeth; there too the context of its use is ferociously satiric.

[27]The Latin of the first two of these lines is particularly difficult. The Oxford Classical Text edition prints "articulis" in the second line where other editions have "auriculis" again; I prefer the latter reading. The precise meaning of "cute perditus," having 'lost one's skin', is uncertain; there may be an obscene reference to "cutis" as the foreskin. (See Freudenburg, p. 172 and n. 90.)

> [You old fraud, are you gathering scraps for other men's ears,
> the same ears to which you'll say "enough" once you've lost
> your skin?
> "For what purpose has previous study, unless this yeast, unless
> the wild fig tree
> which has been once brought to birth inside me should burst
> forth through my liver?"]

The "leaven"—the content that causes the body (and the book) to swell and inflate—is here the poet's learning, the material he has studied and with which he has stuffed his work full in order to inflict it upon others who, still more corrupt than he, will be happy to listen until he bursts. The sheer volume of the bad poet's work will burst his bounds: the very bounds of his body as the volume is associated with his physical extent. Donne's poem is playing upon a similar conceit. Addressing Coryate's folio as if it were a person, it flips back and forth between speaking to the work itself or to its author. The syntax repeatedly plays upon this ambiguity by blurring the distinction between author and book: "And thou / This Booke, greater than all, producest now" (7–8). At line 17 the address to Coryate seems to spill over to his work: "When wilt thou be at full, great Lunatique? / Not till thou'exceed the world?"[28]

The second and third verse paragraphs of the poem, the vast majority of the text (lines 21–72) consist of a lengthy variation upon the theme of the book's physical use: not as reading matter, but to wrap spices (34), other foodstuffs (39–40), or indeed any wares at all (43–45); and for other purposes: to cut counters for gambling (55–57), to wrap pills (61), to plug guns (62), and in binding new books (67). The work is apparently so enormous that it could provide paper enough for all these, and more.

The essential conceit, as Milgate notes, is an ancient one, to be found at Horace *Epistles* II.1.269–270 (wrapping incense, perfume, and

[28]The image of the book as a monstrous human body is perhaps indebted to Coryate's description of the alphabetical distich verses with which the work begins: "Certaine opening and drawing Distiches to be applied as mollifying Cataplasmes to the Tumors, Carnosities, or difficult Pimples full of matter appearing in the Authors Front, conflated of Stiptike and Glutinous Vapours arising out of the Crudities: The heads whereof are particularly pricked and pointed out by letters for the Readers better understanding" (a1^{r}).

pepper), Catullus 95.7 (mackerel), Martial III.2.4 (pepper and incense again) as well as Persius *Satires* I.41–43 (both mackerel and incense). Donne's extended version of the motif begins recognizably from these models: "And thy leaves must embrace what comes from thence [the east], / The Myrrhe, the Pepper, and the Frankinsence" (33–34).[29] The formulation here is closest to Horace: the general Latin terms "tus" (incense), "odores" (scents or perfume), and "piper" (pepper) are specified by Donne to mildly sacrilegious effect: he adds that the book's "embrace" of these exotic eastern products "magnifies thy leaves" (35). The combination of frankincense and myrrh suggests the offerings of the magi to the infant Christ, and the religious overtones of "magnify" add to the joke. The book's "embrace" of these substances, of course, is simply to wrap them, and so be "magnified"—enlarged—by their containment. All that follows in Donne's poem—the imaginative hyperbole of the many other uses of these pages—is in effect a commentary, *in extenso*, of the final clause of Horace's poem: "et quidquid chartis amicitur ineptis" (270)—as well as the incense, perfume, and pepper, "whatever else is wrapped in useless pages."[30]

In its undiscriminating attempt to be, and to say, everything, Coryate's book risks amounting to nothing. His "Gyant-wit" (75) thrusts aside all meaning, and repels the reader, like the acquisitive reach of the statutes in the satires:

---

[29]Compare Donne, *Satyre V*, line 85 (pepper only) and the *Apologetical Dialogue* to Jonson's *Poetaster*: "And the poor wretched papers be employ'd / To cloth *tabacco*, or some cheaper drug" (171—172).

[30]Once again, Donne takes his cue from Coryate himself, who writes in the author's dedicatory epistle to Prince Henry:

> *by these and such like perswasions of my friends I was animated to publish the Obseruations of my trauels much sooner than I thought to haue done, and to addresse them to your excellent Highnesse, not that I hold them worthy to vndergoe your Highnesse censure, seeing many of them deserue rather* ad falsamentarios amandari, *as learned* Adrian Turnebus *writeth of his* Aduersaria, *and* (*as* Horace *saith*:)
>
> Deferri in vicum vendentem thus & odores,
> Et piper, & quicquid chartis amicitur ineptis.
>
> (*Crudities b*1^{r}; italics as in the original)

> Therefore mine impotency I confesse;
> The healths which my braine beares, must be farre lesse;
> Thy Gyant-wit o'rethrowes me, I am gone,
> And rather then reade all, I would reade none.
> (73–76; the final lines of the poem)

The mock-panegyric of this poem began as we have seen with the loaded term "sesqui-superlative": a jibe rooted both in Coryate's own distinctive compounding style, and in the literary associations of satiric enormity in Horace and Persius—and specifically, *stylistic* excess. Just as *Satyre I* associates good ethical judgment and the ability to choose the right path in every sphere with choices of genre and mode, so too the Horatian fabric of the Coryate poem links the work's prodigal inclusiveness with its misjudged style.

"Sesqui-superlative" is not, I think, a term of religious satire in *Upon Mr Thomas Coryats Crudities*. But the connection between literary and religious judgment, and the possibility of combining the two in serious verse is, as we have already seen, central to Donne's thought. In the final section of this essay I would like to turn to Donne's epistle *To Mr Roland Woodward*, an apparently very different poem, in which the central concerns of ethical, literary, and religious choices are placed within the context of virtuous friendship. In exploring and articulating these themes Donne returns once again to Horatian hexameter verse.

* * * *

The epistle to Woodward beginning "Like one who'in her third widowhood" presents several problems of interpretation: styled an epistle, it includes no direct address to Woodward until the final stanza: "Manure thy selfe then, to thy selfe be'approved" (34). Even then, the second person of this line seems very general; only in the very final line of all does the tone become convincingly personal: "know, that I love thee'and would be lov'd" (36). The epistle begins with a description of the (tongue-in-cheek) "retirement" of the author's Muse, the inspiration for his poems, which raises the question: in her absence, how has this poem come about? The epistle is divided into two apparently distinct parts: a short declaration of the Muse's retreat (1–9); and a longer section advising ethical "retirednesse" and self-examination (10–36), an

incitement to "Religion" that makes no mention of religious doctrines at all, and whose commonplaces are derived largely from Horace and Persius.[31]

The "retirednesse" of the speaker's Muse in the opening lines of the poem is evidently ironic. This Muse "doth professe / Her selfe a Nunne, ty'd to retirednesse" but many points indicate that she is not to be trusted: she is compared to a woman in her "third widdowhood," presumably all too likely to go on to a fourth husband; her profession of chastity is described as "affectation" ("So'affects my muse now, a chaste fallownesse," 3); and in any case, the term "fallow" describes a field left unsown for a short period only. In the second stanza a reason ("Since shee. . . ," 4) is given for her temporary retreat:

> Since shee to few, yet to too many'hath showne
> How love-song weeds, and Satyrique thornes are growne
> Where seeds of better Arts, were early sown.
>
> (3–6)

The agricultural metaphor is Biblical:

> And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying,
> Behold, a sower went forth to sow;
> And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the
> fowls came and devoured them up;
> Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth:
> and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness
> of earth:
> And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because
> they had no root, they withered away.
> And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and
> choked them:

[31]Milgate also notes a change of tone at line 10; he suggests that the longer, latter portion of the poem resembles in style the verse epistles to Wotton (by which this poem is accompanied in most of the manuscripts), and that the first lines are closer in tone to the short verse letters of 1592–1595, and were perhaps originally composed at that earlier date (p. 223).

> But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty-fold.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.
>
> But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.
>
> Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:
>
> But while the man slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.
>
> But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.
>
> (Matthew 13:3–8; 22–26)

The version in Mark and Luke of the first of these parables is very similar; but in both of those gospels, Jesus adds an explicit interpretation of his story:

> Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.
>
> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.
>
> (Luke 8:10–11)

The "seeds of better Arts" (6) are thus aligned with the "good seeds" of the Gospels—that is, the word of God; and, perhaps by transferral, religious poetry or preaching on the topic of that Word. The "thornes" of satire allude to the thorns in the first of these parables; while "tares" are weeds, like the "love-song weeds" of the poem. Moreover, in Donne's epistle, the individual is not a single plant, the corn that hopes to grow from the seed of God's word, but the field itself. This field (the soul) must be tilled and sown and cared for—even manured ("Manure thy selfe then," 34)—if the seed of God's word is to flourish and grow. Each man must care for the field, that is for his soul, as the farmer does, and the mixture of metaphors is indicated by the various verbs of the penultimate

stanza: "If we can stocke our selves, and thrive, [we may] uplay / Much, much dear treasure for the great rent day" (31–32). "Stocke" is a transitive verb suitably applied to the objects of the farmer's labor, produce he has gathered and stored; but "thrive," an intransitive verb, applies better to the crop itself.

So this agricultural metaphor, and the Gospel parable to which it alludes, frames the poem. But held within it, in lines 16–30, is another complex but separate movement. These lines begin by stating: "There is no Vertue, but Religion" (16), a direct challenge to ancient wisdom and literature, in which "virtue" is the central concern. The virtues enumerated—"Wise, valiant, sober, just"—are dismissed simply as "names, which none / Want, which want not Vice-covering discretion" (17–18). Anyone can appear to be these things—the key classical aspects of virtue—if he or she has the wit to conceal his vice.

The following four stanzas offer an alternative approach, one centered not on the "virtues" but on self-examination: "Seeke wee then our selves in our selves" (19). This process is founded upon "retirednesse" (28), echoing the ironically unworldly "Nunne," the Muse of the poem's opening lines, who is "ty'd to retirednesse" (2). This "retired" stability is contrasted with the false freedom of restless wandering:

> To rome
> Giddily, and bee every where, but at home,
> Such freedome doth a banishment become.
> (28–30)

These two thoughts—self-examination, and the deceptive freedom of "wandering"—are both to be found in the hexameter verse, the satires and epistles, of Horace and Persius. In his first book of *Epistles*, Horace makes several references to the false freedom of travel as opposed to the true freedom of the "animus aequus": the balanced or "constant" mind of the translation of *Epistles* I.18 with which this article began; a mind, that is, equally disposed to meet good or ill fortune, and calm in the face of either eventuality. The fullest instance of this theme is to be found in the closing lines of *Epistles* I.11:

> caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt.
> strenua nos exercet inertia: navibus atque

> quadrigis petimus bene vivere. quod petis hic est,
> est Vlubris, animus si te non deficit aequus.
> (26–30)[32]

> [Those who rush overseas exchange the weather, not their hearts.
> Energetic inactivity wears us out: in boats and
> in chariots we hunt for the good life. What you seek is here,
> and it's at Ulubrae, if your balanced mind doesn't fail you.]

Epistles I is also concerned with self-determination, with concern for one's own spiritual or moral welfare without excessive regard for others in a manner not dissimilar to the poem under discussion. *Epistles* I.7 ends with an injunction "metiri se quemque suo modulo ac pede verum est" (98), "the true path is for everyone to measure himself by his own rule, by his own foot." The concept of an "aequus animus" recurs as we have already seen at the close of the important *Epistles* I.18, again in the context of self-reliance: "aequum mi animum ipse parabo" (112), "I shall prepare for myself a balanced mind."[33]

---

[32]Similarly, several of the letters are concerned, with wry self-deprecation, with the poet's own failure to master this lesson and with his roving dissatisfaction wherever he is: "Romae Tibur amem ventosus, Tibure Romam" (*Epistles* I.8.12). The slave Davus mocks the poet for just this failing in *Satires* II.7: "In Rome you'd prefer the country, when in the country you exalt the distant city even to the stars, fickle as you are" (28–29). In both the *Satires* and the *Epistles*, the constant human greed for something else—whether in matters of sex, profession, property, or even poetry—is perhaps the single most significant and essential vice. The version of this concerned with geographical location is particularly appropriate to the epistolary form.

[33]We have already seen the resonance of "giddiness" in contrast to "constancy" in the opening lines of Donne's *Satyre I* (9–12). Another epistle, to Sir Henry Wotton ("Here's no more newes, then vertue") again associates the word with youth and literature of an inferior kind: "Beleeve mee Sir, in my youths giddiest dayes, / When to be like the Court, was a playes praise, / Playes were not so like Courts, as Courts'are like playes" (19–21). "Giddy Travellers," again associated with youth and the self-indulgence of youthful pursuits (in this case science and the "Arts"), is also found in the first stanza of the early epistle (in fact two distinct sonnets) *To Mr B. B.* (probably Beaupré Bell). In this context, to "rome giddily" perhaps suggests literary self-indulgence in particular as well as more generalized youthful indecision and adventure.

The inward-focused intensity of Donne's imagery is reminiscent too of Persius's relentless self-examination, especially in the fourth satire, his most sustained investigation of self-scrutiny. The speaker of that poem laments that "nemo in sese temptat descendere" (23), "no-one attempts to descend into himself," and the poem ends with the exhortation: "tecum habita: noris quam sit tibi curta supellex" (52), "dwell with yourself: you'll realize how scant your furniture is."[34] But if Donne's metaphorical boldness is indebted to Persius, the shape and resolution of this poem is not: whereas Persius's fourth satire ends with harsh criticism, Donne's poem, like many of Horace's epistles, concludes with the loving—and improving—context of real friendship.

So we have a poem framed by a parable concerned with receiving God's word without being distracted by the devil, by ambition, and by the temptations of the world (for which the "thorns" stand in the Gospel explication). Inserted within this is a section devoted, apparently, to "Religion" (as opposed to virtue), which sets out not a recognizably Christian doctrine, or indeed any particular branch of it, but rather a recommendation to self-examination, and so true freedom, derived from the broadly Stoic philosophical passages of Horace and Persius.

Surprisingly, the only clear *vice* mentioned (as opposed to the list of classical virtues dismissed as superficial) is "vanity" (12), apparently considered by God to weigh "as much as sinne" (12). Why does the speaker mention vanity in particular at this point? As a vice it seems to bear little obvious relation to the "love-song weeds, and Satyrique thornes" (5) that the speaker seeks to renounce. Many generations of commentators are surely right to see a connection here to Donne's own generic choices—of the *Elegies* and the *Satyres*.[35] But the poet does not simply denounce these genres, and "Poëtrie" in general; rather, he claims that they must to be supplemented in some way:

---

[34]Compare also Donne's epistle to Sir Henry Wotton ("Sir, more than kisses"): "Be then thine owne home, and in thy selfe dwell" (47) and the continuation of that thought in the lines that follow.

[35]See, for example, Milgate, p. 223. Though we might also note that the line "Since shee to few, yet to too many'hath showne" (4) also suggests that poetic *trends* more generally amongst Donne and his contemporaries are implied; the line also of course continues the conceit of her sexual infidelity—she may not have been involved with many other men, but still undoubtedly too many for the author's taste.

> Though to use, and love Poetrie, to mee,
> Betroth'd to no'one Art, be no'adulterie;
> Omissions of good, ill, as ill deeds bee.
> (7–9)

The poet's "vanity," about which he is particularly concerned, is located in his pride in, or perhaps simply his writing of, these genres—love-lyric and satire—which are somehow opposed to the seed that is the word of God: scripture, perhaps, or preaching; or at least religious verse. (Although even here the poet's insistence upon his own poetic independence is marked.) Once again, we have a poem concerned with the connection between literary choices—of genre and content—and moral or religious allegiance.

But that is not quite all. We have seen how this poem of personal choice frames generic classical wisdom on the topic with pertinent material from the Gospels; but its epistolary form and specific details of its structure are modelled—appropriately—upon Horace's own first epistle, which announces a similar shift in poetic priorities:

> nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono;
> qui verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum;
> condo et compono quae mox depromere possim.
> (*Epistles* I.1.10–12)

> [So now I set aside verses and other trifles;
> what is true and proper, that's my concern, that's my question,
> and to this I am entirely devoted;
> I store up and set aside so in the near future I can draw from
> my supplies.]

Both Donne and Horace announce a departure in their verse: but the form of their ethical seriousness remains poetic, and the first section of the Woodward poem concludes with confirmation of that: "Though to use, and love Poëtrie, to mee, / Betroth'd to no'one Art, be no'adulterie" (7–8).

This combined announcement of an artistic departure with an insistence upon continuing artistic independence is also to be found in Horace's poem. Where Donne is "[b]etroth'd to no'one Art," Horace is "nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri" (15), "bound to swear

allegiances to the words of no master," a rich declaration of independence both philosophical (from any particular school), literary and social, despite the pragmatic realities of patronage and dependence upon Maecenas. In context, it is a strong image: the "master" is also the slave-gladiator's owner, in a recurrence of the opening image of the poem. In Donne's lines, this imagery of social dependence or discipleship is (characteristically) recast in the language of marriage and fidelity; he is claiming that his devotion to poetry should not mean the neglect of what is "good."

As we have seen, Donne's poem resolves the Gospel parables of sowing and harvesting into an image of self-stocking, with wisdom and knowledge, against the day of judgment:

> Wee are but farmers of ourselves, yet may,
> If we can stocke our selves, and thrive, uplay
> Much, much deare treasure for the great rent day.
> (31–33)

As well as an imaginative recasting of a Gospel metaphor—"the harvest is the end of the world" (Matthew 13:39); "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth. . . . But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:19–20)—this language of stocking and storing echoes Horace, and works a variation upon his doubleness. "Condo" and "compono" are both words used literally of storing or setting aside, but metaphorically of poetic composition.[36] Donne's turn to religious matters, like Horace's to ethics in *Epistles* I.1, is rooted in the texts of his faith; but it is no less poetic for that.

Horace's first epistle ends by claiming that a series of typical classical blessings—to be "rich, free, honored, handsome, king of kings" (106–107)—all derive from achieving wisdom, from being "sapiens" (106). The terms of Donne's argument confront and correct Horace: he claims that the classical virtues, enumerated with a similar list, are meaningless unless rooted in religion, and the first of those virtues is Horace's

---

[36]Roland Mayer remarks of this phrase: "metaphors for poetic composition . . . elegantly revert to more basic senses, which suggest a new metaphor, 'psychic stewardship.'" He cites *Epistles* I.3.24, "condis amabile carmen," and *Epistles* II.2.91, "carmina compono," as examples (*Horace: Epistles Book I* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], p. 91).

"sapiens": "Wise, valiant, sober, just, are names, which none / Want, which want not Vice-covering discretion" (17–18). But the structure of the arguments is similar. For Horace blessings stem from true wisdom; for Donne even wisdom is unreal without religion.

Donne's poem to Woodward, like Horace's first epistle—and, indeed, partly *by means of* Horace's poem—succeeds in suggesting a new kind of poetry: a form that both encourages and exemplifies searching self-examination in a classical mould, and associates that moral seriousness not with the rejection of poetry as an example of youthful self-indulgence but with the development of a mature poetic mode, and the cultivation of an appropriate literary milieu. The "manure" with which the poet and his friends nourish their souls includes this poetry itself, poetry which the epistle associates with the "better crop" sprung from the Word of God. The claim is a major one: that art must be informed by faith and by scripture; and that if it is, poetry itself may be active in our salvation.

The three poems I have considered in this essay—Donne's first satire, his occasional verse on Thomas Coryate's *Crudities*, and his epistle to Roland Woodward—are distinct and unrelated works; two of them have received very little critical attention. But in each we find evidence of an ongoing imitative relationship with Horatian hexameter verse (as well as that of Persius) of flexibility and importance: a relationship that makes the drama of the poet's choice—of genre, of behavior, of religion—a drama rooted in, but ultimately extending beyond, Horace's own versions of that dilemma.

> In great hals
> Carthusian fasts, and fulsome Bacchanalls
> Equally'I hate; meanes blesse. . . .
> (*Satyre II*, 105–107)

"Carthusian fasts" and "fulsome Bacchanalls" are obvious images of extremes to be avoided: excessive fasting; indulgent feasting. They are also indicative of religious practice: an extreme form of Catholic monasticism that out-Puritans Puritans opposed to the devotions to Bacchus, god of wine and frenzy. The suggestion of denominational differences is overlaid by the opposition between Christian and pagan forms of excess, and all these elements are placed in a recognizably social and contemporary context by their enactment in "great hals." Donne

proclaims to hate with impartial equality ethical extremes of any sort; religious mania of either kind; both what is Christian and what is classical if it is ill-judged. Instead he gives his blessing to "meanes": the mean known from Aristotle and from Horace, a classical moderation in all things. It is this moderation that the (Christian) speaker "blesses": not simply approves of, but religiously endorses. It is the articulation of Horatian "meanes"—both modes and moderations—as a valid Christian choice in poetry as in life that animates Donne's satires and epistles alike.

The Queen's College, Oxford University