

Drama and the notions of literary propriety and verisimilitude in Francesco Robortello's paraphrase on Horace's *Ars Poetica*

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The chief doctrine in the *Ars Poetica* is the doctrine of literary propriety, or *decorum*. Cicero supported this doctrine, and the commentators found support for it in both the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. As a result, *decorum* became a major law in Renaissance literary criticism; it was corollary, if not synonymous, with verisimilitude.

Thus speaks Marvin T. Herrick in the study he wrote about the humanistic commentaries on Horace's *Art of poetry* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, underlining the importance of the concept of *decorum* – or *convenientia* – in the epistle.¹ As he points out, the concept of *decorum*, which is the Latin equivalent of the Greek τὸ πρέπον holds an important position in the (mostly rhetorical, but also moral) treatises of Cicero. *Decorum* is generally regarded as being of two types: internal *decorum*, which refers to the congruency between the different sections of the text, and external *decorum*, which refers to the way authors adapt their discourse to the situation.² Both aspects of the notion of *decorum*, that we here chose to translate as Marvin T. Herrick does with «literary pro-

1 *The Fusion of Horatian and Aristotelian Literary Criticism, 1531–1555, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* V. 32, No. 1, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1946, p. 108. — The author of the article is a PhD student at Rennes 2/Federico II Napoli. This article is the result of a communication given in French and later translated in English. I would like to thank Hélène Le Touze, Catherine Vas and Sarah Williams who kindly helped me to correct this paper.

2 The notion of *decorum* is especially well developed and explained in H. Lausberg, *Manual de Retórica literaria, Fundamentos de una ciencia de la literatura*, vol. I, Biblioteca Románica Hispánica, Madrid, 1990, § 1055–1058, p. 374–377. Cf. also J. Jasinski, *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, Thousand-Oaks, London, New Delhi, 2001, p. 146–151. The notion is also especially well explored in relation to Horace and his Renaissance commentators in the following articles: N. Dauvois, «Decore, convenance, bienséance et grâce dans les arts poétiques français, (re)naissance d'une poétique de la différence», in: *Camena* n°13, oct. 2012; J. Lecointe, «Josse Bade et l'invention du «decorum» horatien», in: *Camena* n°13, oct. 2012; V. Leroux, «Présence et interprétations du «decorum» horatien dans les poétiques néo-latines», in: *Camena* n°13, oct. 2012.

priety»,³ are everywhere to be perceived in the Horatian epistle, even though they do not explicitly appear in the text. Indeed, *decorum* does not appear in the epistle but «decentem» can be found on line 92, where Horace insists on the fact that the poet should choose a type of verse that fits the subject and the genre he decided to deal with:

Singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decentem.⁴

«Decent» appears at line 106, a passage in which Horace explains that if the poet wants to move his audience, he needs to make sure that the words that he puts into the mouth of his characters suit their mood:

Tristia maestum
uoltum uerba decent, iratum plena minarum,
ludentem lasciuia, seuerum seria dictu. [105–107]⁵

«Decor» can be read on line 157 regarding, again, the literary propriety of characters:

Aetatis cuiusque notandi sunt tibi mores,
mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis. [156–157]

And «deceat» can be found at line 308, where Horace announces that he wants to teach what is appropriate and what is not for a poet:

Ergo fungar uice cotis, acutum
reddere quae ferrum ualet exsors ipsa secandi;
munus et officium, nil scribens ipse, docebo,
unde parentur opes, quid alat formetque poetam,
quid deceat, quid non, quo uirtus, quo ferat error. [304–308]

«Conuenientia» appears only twice. The first time we encounter it is at line 119, where Horace questions the two options that are offered to the poet regarding the invention of characters: to follow the tradition or to build new characters that are consistent:

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- 3 In the 1522 edition of Robert Estienne's *Dictionarium Latinogallicum*, *aptus* is translated as «Apte, Convenable, et propre à quelque chose, Bien sortable, Pertinent, Approprié» («Apt, adequate, and fitting, well suited, relevant, appropriate»), and *conuenientia* as «Conuenance, La bienséance [sic] et rapport des parties l'une à l'autre, Accordance.» («Appropriateness, propriety and the relationship between parts. Congruence.»). *Decorum* is defined as «Cette grâce ou bienséance qu'une personne a à dire ou faire quelque chose» («This grace or propriety with which someone says or does something»).
- 4 We used the edition of *Ars Poetica*. by F. Villeneuve, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1995.
- 5 The Latin editions we cited in this article all used «i» for «j» and «u» for «v». We chose to maintain the typography in the passages we quoted.

Aut famam sequere aut sibi conuenientia finge
 scriptor [...]. [119–120]

The second time it appears is on line 316, where Horace again discusses the necessity of literary propriety when it comes to characters:

Qui didicit, patriae quid debeat et quid amicis,
 quo sit amore parens, quo frater amandus et hospes,
 quod sit conscripti, quod iudicis officium, quae
 partes in bellum missi ducis, ille profecto
 reddere personae scit conuenientia cuique. [312–316]

When referring to the same idea of literary propriety, the notion of «aptum» also needs to be mentioned. Horace uses it on line 81 to stress the fact that the iambic meter is the one that best fits theatrical dialogue:

Archilochum proprio rabies armauit iambo;
 hunc socci cepere pedem grandesque coturni,
 alternis aptum sermonibus et popularis
 uincentem strepitus et natum rebus agendis. [79–82]

He also uses «aptis» on line 178, in a passage where he explains that each age of humanity should be depicted behaving and speaking as befits its nature:

Multa ferunt anni uenientes comoda secum,
 multa recedentes adimunt. Ne forte seniles
 mandentur iuueni partes pueroque uiriles;
 semper in adiunctis aeuoque morabitur aptis. [175–178]

and «apte» on line 195, where he writes that the choir should not sing anything that would not meet the needs of the subject treated by the poet:

Actoris partis chorus officiumque uirile
 defendat, neu quid medios intercinat actus,
 quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte. [193–195]

As M. T. Herrick points out, in *Ars Poetica*, the notion of literary propriety is very often associated, whether explicitly or implicitly, with the notion of verisimilitude. It is indeed thanks to literary propriety, among other things, that the poem can imitate nature. Our purpose here is to study how 16th century commentator Francesco Robor-

tello, who wrote a paraphrase on the Horatian epistle, understands the way Horace combines the notions of literary propriety and verisimilitude and applies them to the actor.⁶ In order to get a global and precise idea of how Robortello proceeds, we will study how he deals with both those notions regarding five topics: characters, meters, *deus ex machina*, actions that cannot be shown on stage and satyric drama.

1 Characters

Robortello links *Ars Poetica* 114–118 (where Horace discusses the importance for the dramatic poet to appropriately depict the nature of the character that is on stage) and the passage of the *Poetics* in which Aristotle talks about the treatment of the *ethos* in tragedy:⁷

[...] praeterquam quod ad interiores animi affectiones respiciendum est, personarum quoque conditio, studium, natio et aetas est consideranda. Nam pro harum rerum diuersitate diuersos quoque mores existere necesse est. De qua re copiose etiam Aristoteles agit in Poetica, ubi de moribus loquitur quidque in his seruandum sit docet.⁸

[On top of having to take into account the inner affections of the soul, one also needs to take into account the characters' conditions, tastes, nations and age. It is indeed relatively to the diversity of those characteristics that different behaviours necessarily appear. Aristotle also treats this subject in the *Poetics*, where he talks about the characters' behaviours and teaches everything that one must pay attention to when it comes to that subject.]

It is fundamental not to alter the nature of a character because that nature influences the character's behaviour on stage. The passage of the *Poetics* that Robortello points out enumerates four goals that the poet who shapes characters should aim at, among which can be found what Aristotle calls: «τὸ ἁμόττοντα», which could be translated as «propriety» and which indeed refers to the idea of fitting, of being appropriate. In his

6 Cf. F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisones inscribitur*, Florence, Laurentius Torrentinus, 1548. The paraphrase immediately follows Robortello's famed commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, and is itself followed by five short treatises (*De satyra*, *De epigrammate*, *De comoedia*, *De salibus*, *De elegia*). Another edition of that paraphrase was printed in Basel by Joannes Hervagius in 1555.

7 *Poetics*, XV, 1454a.

8 F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisones inscribitur*, Florence, 1548, p. 7. We are currently working on an edition of Robortello's paraphrase as part of our PhD thesis, and even though the pagination we used here refers to the Florentine print's pagination, we quoted our own edition of the text for which we modernised the punctuation. Our thesis should normally be published online by Rennes 2 once finished.

Latin translation of the *Poetics*, Alessandro Pazzi translates «τὸ ἁμόττοντα» with «conuenientes»⁹, identifying it with the Latin notion of *convenientia* or *decorum*.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle illustrates the idea of propriety with an example. He explains that a character can be virile but it is not fitting that a woman be virile or eloquent. The example provided by Aristotle is not about moral judgement but about verisimilitude: we are supposed to understand that it would not be appropriate for a female character to possess those qualities (because they are both regarded as virile) and for a female character to display them would make it impossible for the audience to believe in the existence of the character itself. If Robortello compares *Ars Poetica* 114–118 and *Poetics* XV 1454a, it is because, in those Horatian verses about characters in plays, he sees a series of precepts about characters' propriety as one of the conditions of the representation's verisimilitude (and efficiency).

Horace talks about the character's propriety again in *Ars Poetica* 153–178, where he insists on the fact that the poet should give the characters traits that fit their age. In his paraphrase, Robortello uses another Greek word to refer to the idea of *convenientia* or *decorum*: «τὸ πρέπον».

Si quis est igitur, qui spectatorum gratiam inire, et plausum, atque acclamationem ab iis elicere in recitatione sui poematis cupit, debet is in primis singularum aetatum quales mores sint, obseruare, ut in omnibus personis describendis illud a Graecis appellatum τὸ πρέπον ubique exprimat. [...] Summa igitur omnium praeceptionum nostrarum haec fuerit: quatenus ad uarias hominum aetates spectat, ut poeta diligenter caueat, ne ea, quae iuueni conueniunt, seni attribuantur; aut quae uirorum propria esse uidentur, puero mandentur; semper enim ea, quae singulis aetatibus adiuncta sunt, sequi debemus, et ipsis, conuenientia quae uideri possint, assignare.¹⁰

[Therefore, if one wants to win the audience's favours and is eager to be applauded and cheered for the public recitation of their poem, they first need to observe the behaviours that are appropriate to each age, in order to express in each and every character what Greeks call «τὸ πρέπον» [...] Here is thus our most important precept: when it comes to the various ages of human life, may the poet be very careful not to give an old man traits that suit a young one and to make sure that those likely

9 Aristotle's *Poetics* was first translated from Greek to Latin by Giorgio Valla in 1498. Another Latin translation made by Alessandro de' Pazzi was posthumously published in 1536 (Pazzi de' Medici, Alessandro: *Aristotelis Poetica, per Alexandrum Paccium, patritium Florentinum, in Latinum conuersa*, Venice, 1536). Robortello refers to both in his *Explicationes on Poetics*.

10 F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisonem inscribitur*, p. 9–10. My italics.

to suit a grown man would not be ascribed to a boy. Indeed, we must always look for the features that are associated with each age and assign to each age the features that seem appropriate.]

The Greek word that Robortello uses here appears in Aristotle's *Poetics* XVII 1455a. The meaning of that term, which Alessandro Pazzi translates as «decorum», is very close to the meaning of «τὸ ἤμóττοντα»¹¹. The idea is, for that matter, the same: each type of character needs to be provided with the traits that best fit it and that suit the audience's expectations. In the absence of literary propriety, there will not be any verisimilitude and the poet will not be cheered by the audience.

Horace also mentions the characters in *Ars Poetica* 119–130. There he makes the distinction between old and new characters. Old characters are the ones that tradition gave us and that were often shown on stage by other poets. New characters are the ones that are shown on stage for the first time. Robortello again links this Horatian passage to *Poetics* XV 1454a and understands «sibi constet» (l. 127) as an equivalent of «τὸ μάλó», which is the fourth aim assigned by Aristotle to the poet who wants to create viable characters, and can be translated as «consistency»:

Si uero noua effingitur persona, quod raro accidit in tragoediis quia, ut Aristoteles ait, paucarum familiarum sunt et nomina noua confingi non possunt, in comoedia uero frequenter (nam pro arbitratu suo unusquisque et argumentum comminisci et nouarum personarum nomina excogitare potest), si igitur hoc fiat, diligenter uidendum est ut mores earum personarum sibi constant et seruent eam quam Aristoteles in Poetica «τὸ μάλó»ocat. Turpe enim fuerit et indecorum, si diuersa conspiciatur in extremis actibus ac ab initio processerit in medium.¹²

[If one creates a new character (this seldom happens in tragedies since, as Aristotle says, characters come from a small number of families and it is impossible to invent new names, but it often happens in comedies since each poet can do as he wishes and imagine a plot or create characters with new names), if this therefore happens, one really needs to carefully consider the characters be-

11 Though τὸ πρέπω and τὸ ἤμóττοντα meanings are very close, they're not exactly identical. τὸ πρέπω is literally translated as «decorum» by Cicero in *Orator*, XXI, 70. As a rhetoric notion developed by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, III, τὸ πρέπω is, as W. H. Beale puts it, «primarily a strategic, rather than an aesthetic or formal concern – it means finding the mode or style of expression that will work best for you under the circumstances» (W.H. Beale, «Decorum», in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition: Communication from Ancient Times to the Information Age*, ed. by T. Enos, New York, 1996, p. 168–169). Τὸ ἤμóττοντα which also refers to the notion of *decorum*, «is related to <harmony> and has the root meaning of <well joined>, as in a carpenter's joint» (O. B. Hardison Jr., L. Golden, *Horace for Students of Literature: The «Ars Poetica» and Its Tradition*, University Press of Florida, 1995, p. 54). Τὸ πρέπω would thus seem to refer mostly to external *decorum*, whereas τὸ ἤμóττοντα would be more likely to refer to internal *decorum*.

12 Ibid., p. 8.

haviours so that they have consistency and keep what Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, calls «τὸ μάλιστ' would indeed be shamefully inappropriate for a character to be depicted in the last acts of a play as different to what it had been at the beginning.]

For a character to be consistent, the poet needs to make sure that it will not change in nature nor behaviour in the middle of the work. In order to describe the impact of inconsistent characters on a poem, Robortello uses two words that are not used by Horace in those lines: «turpe», a term which comes from the moral field and refers to the idea of something that is misshapen and shameful, and «indecorum» («inappropriate»), a term with marked moral overtones. Both words suggest that the poet who would dare to show inconsistent characters would fail both from an aesthetic and a moral point of view. As Horace points out in *Ars Poetica* 309–316, to be a good poet, one needs to be a true, highly moral Roman citizen who knows exactly how a man should behave. Only the poet who knows exactly how to behave morally will be able to create characters in an appropriate way¹³, which is why showing inappropriate characters will be disapproved twice over by the audience. The first disapproval will be from the aesthetic point of view: the lack of propriety produces deformity, and deformity is unpleasant and for that reason will be mocked and booed. The second will regard the moral field: the poet will be blamed for his incapacity to create characters in accordance with the moral requirements of the city. An inconsistent character will thus be completely inappropriate and, as a result, also incapable of creating verisimilitude.

2 Meters

In *Ars Poetica* 79–82, Horace mentions the iambic trimeter, which was the meter used by Archilochus to insult his enemies and which became the meter of tragedy and comedy, because the iambic is the «appropriate foot for dialogue» («pedem alternis aptum sermonibus», *A.P.* 80–81). In his paraphrase, Robortello develops the idea that the iambic is the meter that best suits theatrical dialogue. To support Horace's argument that the iambic meter is of all meters the most appropriate to theatrical dialogue, Robortello relies on Aristotle's authority. He refers to *Poetics* IV 1449a, where Aristotle

13 As Horace says in *Ars Poetica* (315–316): «[...] ille profecto / reddere personae scit conuenientia cuique».

explains that iambic meter was adopted by tragic and comic poets because iambic rhythm was very close to prose rhythm:

Iambici uersus [...], sicut in Poetica docet Aristoteles, aliquanto post asciti fuerunt a comicis et tragicis poetis ad sua poemata scribenda. Nam, ut etiam Aristoteles in Poetica, iambus proxime accedit ad solutam orationem, et homines inter se colloquentes in quotidiano conuictu multos sine ulla meditatione proferunt iambos. Quoniam igitur in comoedia et tragoedia inest imitatio earum rerum quae ab hominibus fiunt, dum inter se colloquuntur, eo opus fuit metro in tali poematum genere. Adde quod metrum hoc, tametsi simile est solutae orationi, uincit tamen popularem illum loquendi modum, et aliquantulum a uulgari consuetudine recedit, ut enim poema aliquod dicatur, non tantum imitatione opus est, sed etiam metro.¹⁴

[Regarding the iambic meter [...], as Aristotle teaches in his *Poetics*, they were afterwards adopted by comic and tragic poets for their plays. Indeed, as Aristotle also wrote in his *Poetics*, the iambic pace is very close to prosaic pace, and in their everyday conversations, people use a lot of iambic meters unwillingly. As a result, since comedy and tragedy both consist of the imitation of an action created by men while they are conversing, that meter was required for that genre of poems. Add to it the fact that the iambic meter, even though it reminds us of prose, is nevertheless distinct from the colloquial way of talking and is slightly distant from the common use – since for something to be called a poem, it is not only imitation that is required, but also meter.]

If the iambic meter is the most appropriate to theatrical dialogues, it is mostly because it is the meter that leads to the best effect of verisimilitude, since it is the meter that gives the most natural rhythm («Nature herself discovered the proper meter») to the characters' conversations, the one that allows «the imitation of an action created by men while they are conversing», as Robortello writes, quoting Aristotle. Verisimilitude here results from the propriety of the meter which itself results from the proximity of the meter to the nature that theatrical dialogues want to imitate. Robortello thus merges the notions of propriety and of verisimilitude with the Aristotelian *mimèsis*.

3 deus ex machina

In *Ars Poetica* 191–192, Horace mentions the intervention of the *deus ex machina* and advises dramatic poets to try not to use the gods to resolve their plots, unless the entanglement is worthy of such an interference. Here is what Robortello writes:

14 F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisonem inscribitur*, p. 6.

Censemus igitur non ubique machinam adhibendam, sed tum solummodo, cum aliquid inciderit, quod labore hominum et industria confici non possit, deorumque ope ac potentia egeat. Aristoteles tamen in libro *Poetica* totam hanc consuetudinem reprehendit, putatque omnino esse e medio tollendam, tum quod praeter uerisimile fit, tum quod ingenioso poetae opera danda est, ut solutionem fabulae non extrinsecus, nam id parum artis in se habet, sed ex ipsamet fabula petat, quod uidetur diligenter a Sophocle seruatum.

[In our opinion, the machine should not be used everywhere, but only when something happens that could not be solved by men's work and resort and would require god's might and power. Aristotle, however, in his *Poetics*, fully blames that habit and believes it should be completely banned, on the one hand because it goes against verisimilitude, on the other hand because a talented poet must carefully think of a dénouement for his play that would not happen outside the plot (since he would then show small artistic skills) but that would precisely come from the plot, a rule that seems to have been followed by Sophocles with a lot of care.]¹⁵

Here, Robortello interprets the Horatian passage by referring to the Aristotelian argument that says that it is better for the dénouement to come from the plot itself, which means from the sequence of actions. But at the same time, he introduces an argument not mentioned by Aristotle in that part of the *Poetics*, that of verisimilitude (*verisimile*): to make a god appear on stage in order to solve a plot tends to suggest a lack of internal *decorum*, which, implicitly, gives rise to improbability. How, indeed, would one believe in a plot in which the actions are not coherently connected? Moreover, the arrival of a god, insofar as it is supernatural (*i.e.* «beyond nature»¹⁶) and thus impossible in the real world, makes it even more difficult to create any kind of verisimilitude since, in that case, art ceases to be an imitation of nature.

4 Actions that cannot be presented on stage

In *Ars Poetica* 179–188, Horace talks about the staging of the plot and explains that there are two ways of doing it: either the action is shown on stage or one of the characters recounts it to the audience once it is accomplished. He insists on the fact that some actions should never be shown on stage, most importantly those which create disbelief («*incredulus odi*», l. 179). Here is Robortello's commentary on Horace:

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶ Nature should then be regarded here as what human beings can understand thanks to rationality and science.

Aliud quoque poetae scribenti tragoediam diligenter considerandum est, nequid absurdum fiat. Hoc uero quale sit, breuiter explico. Res aut agitur ab histrionibus in scaena, aut intus acta nunciatur, atque exponitur. [...] Debebit igitur attente operam dare poeta, ut internoscat, quae agenda, quaeue non agenda sint in scaena; nonnulla enim intus occultanda sunt, nec in scaenam promenda. Atque ut ne ignorentur, cum fuerint ex oculis sublata, peropportune hoc a ueteribus excogitatum fuit: ut ab aliquo narrentur, postquam acta sunt, neque enim humanitas, et mollitudo animorum patitur, ut Medea coram populo filios suos trucidet; aut Atreus uir maxime nefarius Thyestae fratris sui filium enectum palam coquat, et patri comedendum apponat; aut Progne plumas induat, et in auem uertatur; Cadmus autem in anguem; si enim huiusmodi spectanda praebuit poeta in scaena, quae crudelitatis plenissima sunt, praeterquam quod illa sua atrocitate animos offendent spectatorum, haec quoque non erunt similia uero. Necesse est igitur, ut et nulla fide dignus appareat, et multum in se concitet spectatores.¹⁷

[When writing a tragedy, the poet must also carefully consider something else, in order to avoid anything that could be absurd. What it is, I will briefly explain. Either something is played on stage by the actors or, having taken place off-stage, it is announced and exposed. [...] Therefore the poet will have to make sure that he knows what can and cannot take place on stage: some actions must indeed be concealed and cannot take place on stage. And in order for those actions not to be ignored though they are removed from sight, here is what the Ancients very opportunely thought of: they should be recounted by someone after taking place, for neither humane nor gentle minds could stand the sight of Medea slitting her sons' throats in front of the people; or the sight of the horrendous ungodliness of Atreus openly cooking the murdered son of his brother Thyestes and serving him to his father as a dish; or the sight of Procne getting covered in feathers and changed into a bird; or the sight of Cadmus changing into a snake. Indeed, if the poet showed those scenes that are full of cruelty on stage, not only would their cruelty offend the souls of the spectators, but they would not be believable either. It is thus inevitable for him to be seen as untrustworthy and to deeply irritate the audience.]

Robortello closely follows Horace. He uses the Horatian idea according to which some tragic scenes (those that are excessively cruel or show monsters) are not suitable for staging because they hurt our notions of humanity («humanitas et mollitudo animorum»), an addition from Robortello to the Horatian text. This is the reason why the poet who writes such scenes for the stage may offend the audience (in Robortello's paraphrase, «offendent» translates Horace's «odi»). Moreover, the result would lack verisimilitude («non erunt similia» is Robortello's interpretation of the *Ars Poetica's* «incredulus»). Some scenes are inappropriate for the stage because they go beyond

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10–11.

the limits of *decorum* and *convenientia*. Being highly immoral and unbelievable they are not compatible with the audience's notions of humanity, no longer fulfilling the audience's expectations. Besides, they would not provide a believable imitation of nature (since they are outside of nature).

5 Satyric drama

In *Ars Poetica* 220–250, Horace deals with the topic of satirical drama. He advises the tragic poet to make sure he does not adopt a style that would be too plain for such plays and to also make sure that his satyrs, creatures of the forest, will not speak the language of the cities. Robortello misinterprets the Horatian passage, because of a confusion on *satyrus* (which refers to the Greek satyric drama), and *satira* (which refers to the Latin satire),¹⁸ a confusion that leads to a rather surprising commentary:

Tragoedia quoque amplificata est, nam inseri coeperunt satyricae recitationes [...].¹⁹

[Tragedy got bigger too, for poets began inserting satyric recitations into it [...]]

In *Ars Poetica* 220–224, Horace clearly refers to the fact that Greek tragic poets had to present three tragedies and one satyric drama at the Great Dionysia, but Robortello seems to understand that this passage is about satirical readings as some kind of interlude within their tragedies, to relax the audience. However, a bit further, he adds:

Aristoteles quoque in Poetica innuere uidetur, satyrica tragicis immista, sed mox sublata ; neque enim conueniebant, quod satyrica poesis magis esset saltatoria, et tetrametro uteretur uersu, qui propter sua longitudinem maxime aptus est ad saltationem.²⁰

18 As F. Lavocat points out, Robortello is not the only 16th century scholar to make a confusion about satyric drama and Roman satire. It was even rather common in his time and is mostly the result of the ambiguity of the word *satyrus* in Horace's poem: «La confusion entre le drame satyrique et la satire latine est opérée par les premiers commentateurs d'Horace et les grammairiens du cinquième siècle, Donat et Diomède ([...]; La lecture erronée par les premiers commentateurs d'Horace, du passage de l'«Épître aux Pisons», ou *Art Poétique*, consacré au drame satyrique, témoigne justement du rôle central de la figure auctoriale dans le glissement de la *satira* à la «satyre». Le contresens concerne [les vers 234–235] où les règles du drame satyrique sont énoncées, sur le mode hypothétique, à propos d'une œuvre que pourrait écrire l'auteur de la lettre. L'ambiguïté du mot *satyrus*, [v. 235], [...] l'absence de toute allusion, dans l'*Épître aux Pisons*, à la satire, alors qu'on attendait sans doute d'Horace qu'il s'exprimât à propos d'un genre dont il faisait figure de modèle, a amené les commentateurs à lire ce passage comme un art poétique auto-réflexif, un commentaire d'Horace sur son œuvre: «satyrorum scriptor amabo» a été rapidement compris comme l'équivalent de «amo quando satyras scribo» [«j'aime quand j'écris des satires»]», (F. Lavocat, *La Syrinx au bûcher, Pan et les satyres à la Renaissance et à l'âge baroque*, Droz, 2005, p. 237–238).

19 F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisones inscribitur*, p. 13.

20 Ibid., p. 13.

[Aristotle himself seems to indicate, in his *Poetics*, that satyric poems were combined with tragedy, but that soon they were removed and, indeed, both genres were not compatible, because satyric poetry is rhythmically closer to dance and uses tetrameters which, because of their length, perfectly suit dance.]

After having mentioned the «satyric recitations» which brings the genre of Latin satire to mind, Robortello talks about the «tetrameter», which is the meter used in satyr plays, whereas the meter employed in the Latin satire is the hexameter. He thus seems to merge two genres that have nothing in common: Greek satyric drama and Latin satire.²¹ He mentions, in passing (and it is of course an addition to *Ars Poetica*), that if poets stopped mixing the satyric genre with the tragic one, it was because of a lack of *convenientia* between both genres («neque enim conueniebant»), especially because of the rhythm used for satyric drama. Then Robortello paraphrases *Ars Poetica* 234–239 this way:

Quantum uero ad dictiones spectat, quibus uti debemus in satyris scribendis, non satis est, ut simplices sint et propriae, multumque dissimiles a tragicis, quae fucatae et grandes esse solent. Sed uidendum quoque, ut ne declinent ad comicam humilitatem. Satyricus enim sermo a comico multum differt, mediumque ueluti quemdam locum obtinet inter tragicum et comicum. Qui igitur satyricum scribit poema, dabit operam ut nota quidem tractet, non secus ac comici et humilia, nam materiae parum differunt; non tamen notis uerbis, sed fictis, et alio quodam modo rem eandem adumbrantibus, quod sermonis genus in primis lepidum est, et suaue, quali usus est Horatius ipse ubique in Satyris, et Epistolis, atque in hoc ipso etiam libello *Poetica*, sicuti unusquisque per se potest cognoscere.²²

21 It is actually rather difficult to understand exactly what Robortello means in his commentary about that passage of the *Ars Poetica* without reading his short essay about the satyric genre that was published as an appendix to Robortello's *Explicationes* on Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this short text, he clearly exposes what he thought satyric drama to be and explains what its links with the Roman satire are. According to him, the old custom was to put the satires (as in Roman satires, in this case) on stage where they would be sung by a choir wearing satyr masks (hence the dance rhythm mentioned by Robortello). He then explains that he believes the custom disappeared not long after comedy was invented, even though the caustique genre favoured by satyrs was still practiced by poets who would call those poems «satyras» because they were very similar to the ancient satyric drama: «Vetus fuit mos satyras in scenam producere eo quo superius expositum est, modo, ut a choris, et personis satyrorum recitarentur. Eum morem sublatum de medio crediderim post inuentam comœdiam; cum tamen adhuc poetae maledicentiam exercerent suam. Eiusmodi mordax poema satyrorum nomine appellarunt quod persimile foret satyris antiquis (sic).» (*Francisci Robortelli Vtinensis explicatio eorum omnium, quae ad satyram pertinent*, Florence, 1548, p. 34). As a result, Robortello understands satyric drama as the stage recitation of a satire, as something between theater, dance and public reading, but certainly not as the theatrical genre that Greek satyr plays were.

22 F. Robortello, *Paraphrasis in librum Horatii qui uulgo de arte poetica ad Pisonem inscribitur*, p. 13.

[Moreover, regarding the vocabulary that we must use to write satyric poems, it is not enough for it to be simple and appropriate, and very different from tragedy's vocabulary which is, generally, grandiose and ornate. One must also make sure that it is not marked by the low style of comedy. Indeed, satyric meter is very different from comic meter and somehow holds the middle between tragic and comic. As a result, the one who writes a satyric poem will try, not unlike the comic poets, to deal with a subject that is known and low, since those two genres do not differ much from one another regarding the subject. However, they will have to use words that are not known but coined, sketching the same subject in a different way, which corresponds to a type of conversation that is mostly gentle and pleasant, like the one used by Horace himself in his *Satires* and his *Epistles*, and also in the small book about the *Art of Poetry*, as everybody can see for themselves.]

Robortello repeats the Horatian precept according to which you must employ a language that suits the genre you work with, and also the precept that makes satyric drama a genre halfway between comedy and tragedy. However, he applies the first precept not to satyric drama but to Latin satire, whose subject is indeed the same as comedy's («nam materie parum differunt»), but whose style differs because it suits a type of conversation («sermonis genus») which is gentle («suaue») and pleasant («lepidum»), just like that of the satires. Robortello's satyric drama therefore is a Latin *sermo* to which the «aurea mediocritas» rule must be applied in order not to break the balance that it maintains with the tragic genre with which it is combined. Both genres must be compatible mostly in terms of tone, because if the tone is too caustic, it will clash with that of the other. Besides, the language of satire must be simpler than that of tragedy, but not too ordinary either, to avoid discordance and to please the ear. Robortello's conclusion is the same as Horace's in *Ars Poetica*: senators and knights, which means citizens with taste, respected by the whole city, will turn their back on the poet who writes in an inappropriate style, and his poem will never be crowned with success.

The conclusion we can draw from studying how Robortello understands the five points of *Ars Poetica* that we decided to focus on (characters, meters, *deus ex machina*, actions that cannot be presented on stage and satyric drama) is that, regarding literary propriety and verisimilitude, our commentator endeavours to make both notions obvious and to clarify the part they play in the Horatian poetics. Propriety is one of the main conditions of verisimilitude in *Ars Poetica*, but Horace seldom puts it explicitly. Robortello's paraphrase tries to make the implicit explicit. To support his paraphrase,

Robortello often refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, carefully selecting passages where the Stagirite deals with the notions of propriety and verisimilitude, in order to make Horace's intentions clearer: Aristotle's theories are thus merged into Horace's *Ars Poetica*, bringing scientific support to the epistle. Moreover, when a major misinterpretation might make it difficult for Robortello to formulate a congruent clarification, as is the case with the satyr plays, he still manages to write a completely coherent (although completely wrong) interpretation of Horace by adhering to the idea of *decorum*. What appears clearly in Robortello's paraphrase is that literary propriety is the fundamental notion of *Ars Poetica*, one which combines congruence, the audience's expectations, verisimilitude, and thus leads to beauty.

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