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# Recusatio as Political Theatre: Horace's Letter to Augustus\*

KIRK FREUDENBURG

## ABSTRACT

*Among the most potent devices that Roman emperors had at their disposal to disavow autocratic aims and to put on display the consensus of ruler and ruled was the artful refusal of exceptional powers, or recusatio imperii. The practice had a long history in Rome prior to the reign of Augustus, but it was Augustus especially who, over the course of several decades, perfected the recusatio as a means of performing his hesitancy towards power. The poets of the Augustan period were similarly well practised in the art of refusal, writing dozens of poetic recusationes that purported to refuse offers urged upon them by their patrons, or by the greater expectations of the Augustan age, to take on projects. It is the purpose of this paper to put the one type of refusal alongside the other, in order to show to what extent the refusals of the Augustan poets are informed not just by aesthetic principles that derive, most obviously, from Callimachus, but by the many, high-profile acts of denial that were performed as political art by the emperor himself.*

**Keywords:** Agrippa; Callimacheanism; Epistle to Augustus; Horace; *moderatio*; political theatre; *recusatio*; refusal; *Res Gestae*

## I RES NON GESTAE: READING THE REFUSALS OF 'AUGUSTUS'

A denarius of 13 B.C.E. issued by the *IIIvir monetalis* C. Sulpicius Platorinus shows Augustus and Agrippa seated side-by-side on a tribune's honorific seat (*subsellium tribunicium*) on a dais decorated with *rostra* (Fig. 1). To the left of the seat is a tall, upright spear, symbolizing the exceptional powers that the two men wielded not as fellow tribunes, but as joint holders of a specially designed tribunician authority (*tribunicia postestas*) that they had held in tandem since 19 B.C.E. Their gestures suggest that the two men are conversing. So unusually well matched are they that the two men

\*For their many helpful comments and criticisms I wish to thank the journal's anonymous readers, as well as the two editors of *JRS* who helped guide me through the process of publication: Greg Woolf gave the paper a fair chance and provided crystal clear and sensible suggestions for its improvement, and Catherine Steel helped me re-think some of the paper's basic assertions on my way to cleaning up and solidifying the final version. The basic ideas of this paper were tested out in lecture form at Yale University, at the *International Conference on Poetics in the Greco-Roman World*, held at the University of Belgrade in October 2011 (co-sponsored by the Institute of Classical Studies, University College, London), and at the University of São Paulo in March of 2013. Helpful criticisms were provided at each of these venues. Special thanks are owed to Alessandro Barchiesi and Maurizio Bettini for commenting on early versions of the paper, and to Joe Farrell for providing several criticisms of, and expressing an encouraging degree of enthusiasm for, a near-final version. Given the paper's large size, I was not able to incorporate all of the ideas and further considerations that my readers urged me to take on. But I plan on giving this article a second, expanded life as a book chapter, and it is there that I hope to give my readers' suggestions all the room they need to breathe.



FIG. 1. Denarius of C. Sulpicius Platorinus, 13 B.C.E. Reverse: image of Augustus and Agrippa, togate, seated on a *bisellium* decorated with three *rostra* (Image courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., © [www.cngcoins.com](http://www.cngcoins.com))



FIG. 2. Denarius of L. Caninius Gallus, 12 B.C.E. Reverse: image of an empty *bisellium* and spear, with the words TR(ibunicia) POT(estas) (Image courtesy of NAC – Numismatica Ars Classica, © <http://www.arclassicacoins.com/index.php>)

sit serenely together on what is otherwise a one-man bench.<sup>1</sup> The denarius is but one of a large number of coins issued in 13 B.C.E. to re-affirm Agrippa's status as co-regent with Augustus, as well as his heir apparent.<sup>2</sup> The following March Agrippa died, leaving Augustus with no apparent heir, and no colleague to balance against himself as a

<sup>1</sup> On the denarius, see Fullerton 1985: 474 and RIC I<sup>2</sup> 407. On details of the coin's iconography, with special attention to the upright spear, see Alföldi 1959: 6. On the 'minting' of messages of collegiality and responsibilities shared evenly between Augustus and Agrippa, see Severy 2003: 75–7.

<sup>2</sup> For the iconography of coins minted in 13–12 B.C.E., see Fullerton 1985.

partner in power. A denarius issued shortly after Agrippa's death by the moneyer L. Caninius Gallus shows a bare-headed Augustus on the obverse, with an empty *subsellium* on the reverse hovered over by the words 'TR[ibunicia] POT[estas]' (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Like a flag drooping at half-mast, the spear leans hard against the empty seat. This image, perhaps a snapshot taken at Agrippa's funeral (cf. the riderless horse paraded at JFK's funeral), speaks powerfully to what has been lost by Agrippa's untimely demise, marking it as a 'great national calamity'.<sup>4</sup> And yet at the same time it speaks to the problem of picturing accurately the disposition of power that actually pertained in Rome in the aftermath of Agrippa's death. For everyone knew that the tribune's seat had not been left empty by the loss of Agrippa. Basic maths said that it still had one man occupying it: Augustus, all by himself.

But it is precisely this impression, that of his ruling alone, that Augustus had gone to such great lengths to avoid since at least 13 January 27 B.C.E., when he ceremoniously ceded back to the Senate and People of Rome the bulk of his formal powers, in a display of supreme reverence towards republican tradition that earned Octavian his reverential name.<sup>5</sup> In the years following the settlement of 27, Augustus ('the Revered One') made a regular show of turning down all offices and honours that smacked of despotic rule.<sup>6</sup> In paragraphs 4–6 of the *Res Gestae* Augustus prefaces the great bulk of his achievements with a long list of what Walter Eder has dubbed his *res non gestae* ('deeds not done') that 'serve to profile the *princeps* as the incorruptible guardian of tradition who took care, even against the will of the Senate and People, not to contradict the constitution of the fathers'.<sup>7</sup> Before telling us what he did in life, Augustus must first tell us what he did not do, in an impressive list of offices and powers that he was offered, but had the requisite 'reverential' sense to say no to. Some of the refusals cited by Augustus were known to have been quite stagey and elaborately performed. One even found him down on his knees, tearing at his clothes before a large audience in a theatre.<sup>8</sup> But as Erich Gruen has pointed out, the basic message that these refusals conveyed was always the same: 'Augustus was *princeps*. But he did not hold a *principatus*.'<sup>9</sup> In essence, they perform his being 'Full of Reverence' towards the traditions of the Roman republic, and therefore worthy of being revered. They show him living up to his unprecedented name, with the reverence that he is so full of, and named by, referring both to the awe he displays towards Rome's sacred traditions, and the awe he inspires in others for being so superhumanly pious in his dedication to holy things.<sup>10</sup>

The repeated refrain of paragraphs 5–6 of the *Res Gestae* is 'I did not accept' ('non recepi'), with the verb *recipere* putting Augustus in the rôle not of a taker, but a mere potential 'receiver' of things that had been thought up and offered by others. Several paragraphs later at *RG* 10.2 he uses *recepti* without *non* to describe his cautious 'acceptance' of an office that had long been his for the taking, but that he had consistently refused to take when it was offered ('populo id sacerdotium deferente ...

<sup>3</sup> See Fullerton 1985: 477–8; *RIC* I<sup>2</sup> 417.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhold 1933: 127.

<sup>5</sup> On Octavian's renunciation of his formal powers in January 31 B.C.E., see Huttner 2004: 81–106.

<sup>6</sup> For Augustus as 'the Revered One', see Eder 2005: 13.

<sup>7</sup> Eder 2005: 14.

<sup>8</sup> See Suet., *Aug.* 52 and Dio 54.1.14. For the specific circumstances of this refusal, see Cooley 2009: 127–8, with relevant bibliography, and Galinsky 1996: 156.

<sup>9</sup> Gruen 2005: 35.

<sup>10</sup> On the moral connotations of the name Augustus, with special attention to the reciprocal and social aspects of the *auctoritas* that he connects both to his name and to his rule at *RG* 34.3, see Galinsky 1996: 10–21. For augustness connected to the awe and deference one shows in the revering of sacred things, cf. Cic., *Nat. D.* 2.62 'quem nostri maiores auguste sancteque Liberum ... consecrauerunt'; 3.53 'quos (deos) auguste omnes sancteque ueneramur'.

*recusauit*). Eventually, after a delay of several decades, when the demands of republican precedent could finally be met, he took on the rôle of Rome's Pontifex Maximus. This happened on 6 March 12 B.C.E., just two weeks before Agrippa's unexpected death. But the last entry in his list of *res non gestae* suggests that, in certain egregious cases, Augustus refused to be worn down. He says that even though the Senate and People had asked him three times to become the curator of laws and morals all by himself ('curator legum et morum summa potestate *solus* crearer'), he refused to accept any such magistracy that so obviously contravened the *mos maiorum* ('*nullum magistratum contra morem maiorum delatum recepi*', RG 6.1). Keenly sensitive to the irony of what he was being asked to do, Augustus points it out for all to see: he could not possibly take up the task of upholding Roman *mores* if the office whereby he was upholding them was itself 'contra morem maiorum'. For Augustus, to hold such an office by himself was both morally objectionable, and a logical impossibility, since the first thing he would have to do to uphold the *mos maiorum* is declare himself immoral for trying to uphold them by himself.<sup>11</sup> Republican tradition required a pair of censors for the oversight and regulation of morals. Thus, in order to give his legal and censorial efforts a (*faux*) republican look, Augustus needed a colleague.<sup>12</sup> And it is here, at the tail-end of his *res non gestae*, that Augustus allows us to see him operating in a different mode, for once actually 'demanding', then 'taking' something that no one has offered: 'five times I demanded from the Senate, and took, a colleague in this power' ('*cuius potestatis conlegam et ipse ultro quinquens a senatu depoposci et accepi*', RG 6.2).<sup>13</sup>

It is precisely when they threaten to make him an autocrat that Augustus makes autocratic demands of the Senate, forcing them to do as he says, and not as they wish. Within the rhetoric of the *Res Gestae*, this is what it means to have an 'Augustus' in charge, a man scrupulously attached to republican ways and determined to see that they are kept to, and held in awe. In the end, his name tells us not just who he was, and how the Senate saw fit to honour him with a lofty and unprecedented title. It tells us how he ruled, designating a system of governance in the absence of any other suitable term. From 13 January 27 B.C.E. on, Rome was an 'Augustanate', which is to say the Roman republic autocratically stabilized, adhered to, and 'guaranteed'.<sup>14</sup> Like Neptune, his divine counterpart in *Aeneid* Book 1, Augustus was invested with an *auctoritas* earned by merits that could inspire awe, quell the seas of discord, and keep things in balance.<sup>15</sup> His name speaks to the authority with which he was invested, and to the awe in which he was held. It describes the workings and rationale of a new kind of republic, one that actually functioned and would not fall apart because this time it had a godlike guarantor at the helm.<sup>16</sup>

Within the rhetoric of the *Res Gestae*, the deeds that Augustus performed point forward to, and make sense of, his being designated 'the Revered One' near the document's end. The inscription describes how he came to merit, and then continued to earn, re-instantiate and re-perform his august-ness by way of the reverence he displayed in every aspect of his rule, whether as builder, warrior, financier, office-holder, or

<sup>11</sup> On the many ambiguities and historical inconsistencies that render Augustus' claims in these lines both historically problematic and conceptually/rhetorically confusing, see Ridley 2003: 101–8.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Fullerton 1985: 478 on the 'pseudo-republican propaganda' in the tribune and censor coin types of 13 B.C.E.

<sup>13</sup> For the five occasions referred to by Augustus in these lines (dating from 18 B.C.E. to 13 C.E.), see Cooley 2009: 132–3.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Vladimir Putin in 2000 heralding his presidency as a 'dictatorship of law'. On the *auctoritas* as a kind of earned moral weight that expresses itself in the power to vouchsafe and guarantee, see Galinsky 1996: 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> On the 'Augustan' figuration of Neptune's *auctoritas* ad Virg., *Aen.* 1.148–56, see Galinsky 1996: 20–4.

<sup>16</sup> On Augustus' right to govern based not on constitutional 'legitimacy' but on his being 'accepted' by the key components of Rome's socially ruling classes, see Flaig 2010: 67–84. Seen from this perspective, the name by which Augustus was honoured in 27 B.C.E. speaks to 'how' he was accepted into a republican (presumably monarch-hating) frame as a monarch of a certain acceptable kind.

whatever. And, as we have seen, key to the rhetoric that proves him ‘Augustus’ are his many refusals to accept offices that contravened republican precedent, his displays of caution and delay in accepting them, as well as his taking pains to reconceive them as republican in spirit before agreeing to take them on. Beyond his many refusals of offices and formal powers, sources outside of the *Res Gestae* describe numerous further occasions when Augustus made similar shows of rejecting, delaying and/or reconceiving special honours that would have marked him as superhuman or one-of-a-kind. A famous example of a refusal craftily negotiated by Augustus concerns the honours that were decreed to him by the Senate in 13 B.C.E.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of that year Augustus made his way back to Rome after several years away on the empire’s troubled frontiers in Spain, Germany and Gaul. To commemorate his return a grateful Senate voted to place an altar within the Senate chamber itself, an unusual honour that Augustus (we are not told why) thought it best to refuse. Instead he allowed the construction of a different altar — not in the Curia but in the Campus Martius, not to himself, but to the Peace he had won — the Ara Pacis Augustae, just as he had accepted the altar of Fortuna Redux six years before, upon his return from a three-year absence in the East. In fact, upon his return in 19 B.C.E., the Fortuna Redux altar was the only one in a raft of honours decreed to him by the Senate that Augustus chose to accept rather than refuse.<sup>18</sup>

In transitioning from the refusals of Augustus to those of the Augustan poets, I focus on this small tale of altars accepted and refused because Horace, the poet with whom I will mostly concern myself in this paper, talks about the dedication of altars and other increasingly ‘divine’ honours that were being taken on by Augustus at the beginning of his letter to the emperor in 12 B.C.E. He begins that poem on a potentially touchy note, by reminding Augustus that he was by now all alone in shouldering the political burdens of Rome, using an emphatic *solus*, ‘all by yourself,’ at the end of the poem’s first line.<sup>19</sup> In the two lines that follow, Horace names precisely those burdens that Augustus had for so long made a point of sharing with Agrippa: leading Rome’s armies and regulating Roman morals (‘armis tuteris, moribus ornes, /legibus emendes’).<sup>20</sup> These opening lines can be taken, as they sometimes are, as a mixture of consolation and praise, marking Agrippa’s death as a calamitous loss both to Augustus and to the state, and praising him for shouldering burdens that are, in the ‘Herculean’ figuration of the poem’s opening, by now as big as the world itself.<sup>21</sup> But, given what we know about how assiduously Augustus sought to eschew the appearance of exercising powers ‘contra morem maiorum’, especially in the matter of regulating Roman morals by himself, these same words can also be taken as unsteadily poised and fragile, as if well intended but not quite the right things to say (more on this below). They could be taken to remind Augustus of the rhetoric whereby he became the Revered One, a rhetoric wherein his

<sup>17</sup> See Dio 54.25.

<sup>18</sup> Dio 54.10.

<sup>19</sup> Brink ad loc. asserts that *solus* is emphatic (‘resoundingly placed at the end’) but unproblematic: ‘To H. the reality of Augustus’ autocracy seems as unambiguous as it does to a Tacitus or Dio.’ Rudd ad loc. rejects the idea of an allusion to the death of Agrippa in the opening lines of the letter. Instead he suggests that by emphasizing *solus* H. is appealing to a despotic vanity on Augustus’ part: ‘No despot, however benevolent, is flattered by the suggestion that someone else has been helping him.’ In fact, Augustus had for many years taken great pains to suggest precisely that. Feeney 2009: 363 follows Syme in connecting the emphatic *solus* to the death of Agrippa, as well as to the death of Lepidus two weeks prior; see also Habinek 1998: 92–3.

<sup>20</sup> On the failure of these lines to align with the more adamantly republican (perhaps deliberately obfuscating) impression left by the *Res Gestae*, see Cooley 2009: 131.

<sup>21</sup> The figure of Augustus as Hercules is thoroughly explored in vv. 5–18; see Brink 1982: 39–58. But the figure is already signalled by *sustineas* in v. 1 (OLD s.v. 5), suggesting that Augustus ‘hoists’ a massive load on his shoulders (cf. Hercules and Atlas); cf. Ov., *Met.* 1–2 on Numa’s accession after the death of Romulus: ‘quaeritur interea quis tantae pondera molis / sustineat.’

being 'Augustus' had nothing to do with being held in awe as a god among men and thus uniquely empowered to 'protect, beautify and correct' Rome all by himself, and everything to do with the reverence that he so meticulously displayed towards the traditions of the *SPQR*. According to his own rhetoric, it was his preternatural reverence towards those traditions that made him preternaturally revered ('*pro merito meo ... Augustus appellatus sum*', *RG* 34.1).<sup>22</sup> But it seems that by 12 B.C.E. the old balance between reverence shown and reverence basked in had drifted heavily to one side.

The epistle to Augustus does not just remind Augustus of specific offices now held, and honours now basked in, that he once made a grand show of reconceiving and/or refusing. The letter is itself a clear acceptance 'in performance' of a high honour that had been tendered to the poet by the emperor when he invited him to address a letter poem to him as to an intimate friend (a *familiaris*). And it is at the same time an elaborately reasoned refusal to accept an even more honour-rich project that had been pressed upon him by the emperor; namely, that of composing Augustus' recent military *res gestae* in (it seems) epic song. In what follows I hope to show that these two very different kinds of refusal (the one performed by Augustus in refusing honours offered to him, the other performed by poets in refusing his offers to them) are, in fact, not so very different. Rather, with the help of Horace's epistle to Augustus, I want to show that the oft-repeated refusals of the Augustan poets to take on projects that, they claim, exceed their talents are informed not just by aesthetic principles that derive, most obviously, from Callimachus, but by the many, high-profile acts of denial that were performed as political art by the emperor himself. A list, long but by no means complete, detailing the history of the emperor's refusals is provided in the Appendix below.

Easily detected in this line of argument are certain distinctive genealogical strains of my own thought. Most obviously in the work of Don Fowler who, working from Walter Benjamin's dictum that 'Fascism renders politics aesthetic', argued for the political implicated-ness of Horace's aesthetic programme, and for all the interesting ways that the emperor's political activities are invested with aesthetic values ('as art') in the *Odes* by being structured there in aesthetic terms.<sup>23</sup> Following up on Fowler's 'aesthetics of politics', and acknowledging a clear debt to Alessandro Barchiesi's *Il Poeta e il Principe*, Denis Feeney wrote a dazzling piece on the numerous points of identity that are shared between, and that confuse the categories of, the poet and the prince in the letter to Augustus, dwelling especially on the stunning confusion of 'the prince as poet' that is featured at the poem's 'political' beginning, and that is mirrored against a matching confusion, 'the poet as prince', at the poem's 'aesthetic' end.<sup>24</sup> It is here, at the poem's end, where Horace reminds Augustus that he, too, is all alone, now that Varius and Virgil are dead.<sup>25</sup> And it is here that he makes his famous refusal to the emperor by citing bad poetry as a problem not just of poets who over-reach, but of princes whose judgement (*iudicium*) fails them in assessing poems written about themselves, because it is clouded by a desire to look superhuman, and by a false belief that unparalleled glory can be purchased (as Alexander had tried to do) by unparalleled expenditures of cash. By the poem's end, Feeney shows, the poet and prince are so figuratively entwined ('*una cum scriptore*') that they cannot be teased apart.

What I hope to bring to the discussion is, first, the fairly simple observation that I have made above: namely, that the poets' many programmatic refusals to take on projects that exceed their powers and/or the limits of decency have a clear counterpart (not just a curious

<sup>22</sup> cf. how authority accrues through merits in the simile of the riot-quelling statesman of *Aeneid* 1.151: 'pietate grauem ac meritis.'

<sup>23</sup> Fowler 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Feeney 2009 (first published in 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Feeney 2009: 368: 'Virgil is now dead, and Horace is now even more exposed in his novel status as the only living classic.'

analogue, I would say, but a ‘structuring structure’ culturally ingrained<sup>26</sup>) in the political theatrics of Augustus himself, whose repeated refusals to take on excessive powers served to set respectable Roman limits around his highly contradictory person, and to program his art of governance in terms of restraint, thereby gaining him the very powers that he so persistently sought to eschew.<sup>27</sup> But this leads to a number of further observations that are at once more far-reaching and compelling because they concern the nature of referentiality itself. Taken always, first and foremost, as a reference to books, the poets’ many refusals in Augustan poetry have tended to take us not to points outside the library, but to other books on the shelf, and only there, with the first point of reference always being traced back to the prologue of Callimachus’ *Aetia*. The Augustan poet’s small poem about why he will not write a big one is thus taken, first and foremost, as a way of engaging with Callimachus as a model: as an assertion of adherence to Callimachean principles of style.<sup>28</sup> All of which is certainly true and worth pointing out, but never anything beyond the interplay of books in the programming of aesthetic principles and the assertion of a certain kind of politically uninvolved and understated self.

But what happens to the poet’s literary gesture and the self he projects when that gesture happens to mirror (in some cases quite powerfully) a well-worn and utterly Roman political gesture?<sup>29</sup> What happens to an intertext when it is also a cultural reference, taking us outside the library, into the habits of the emperor’s political theatre and the deeper structures of Roman thought? Concerning the political gains won by the emperors’ repeated political denials, Wallace-Hadrill has provided a crisp summary: ‘The Principate was established by an act of denial (*recusatio*), ritually perpetuated from reign to reign. It is this pose of denial that itself constitutes the dominant feature of imperial ceremonial.’<sup>30</sup> But Dio’s account of the events of 13 January 27 B.C.E. suggests that when Octavian offered to return full authority to the Senate and People of Rome, he did so by citing the ‘superhuman’ precedent of his father Julius, who had so famously refused the crown offered to him by Mark Antony in front of an awe-struck crowd at the Lupercalia of 15 February 44 B.C.E.<sup>31</sup> One could go on with examples both positive and negative from both before and after the Augustan period, most famously the bungled *recusatio* of Tiberius on 18 September 14 C.E. Tacitus’ keenly critical analysis of this event indicates that *recusationes* were closely scrutinized and critically reacted to in Rome, and that they could be taken as sincere, hypocritical, or otherwise, depending on one’s own political stance, and one’s willingness to authorize any given act of refusal as appropriate and/or sincere.<sup>32</sup> Such elaborately negotiated refusals had a

<sup>26</sup> ‘Structuring structure’ refers to Bourdieu’s concept of a culturally internalized and widely shared ‘disposition’ (*habitus*) invested with its own internal logic that tends to reproduce itself externally via ‘practical metaphors’ as certain kinds of highly stylized and culturally readable actions, perceptions and attitudes. Bourdieu applies this concept to the analysis of life-styles and patterns of consumption in the structuring of class distinctions; see especially Bourdieu 1984. I use the phrase here only to suggest that the public refusals of poets and princes in Rome deserve to be regarded in an analogous way, as stemming from a shared disposition, a moral structure, deeply ingrained (however we imagine that to work).

<sup>27</sup> Price 1984: 73: ‘The offer of divine cult cannot be seen as something which any reasonable being would reject. In place of an *a priori* psychology specific historical reasons must be sought. Unlike the Roman emperor, the Hellenistic king was not confined by a tradition of acting like a citizen.’

<sup>28</sup> For a useful summary of the history of poetic refusals in Rome, with standard bibliography, see Lyne 1995: 31–9. Valuable recent additions include Cameron 1995: 454–83; Tatum 2000; Bowditch 2001; Harbach 2010: 206–31; Barchiesi 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Analogously, cf. the structuring of Paul’s refusal of various honours (I Cor. 9: 1–18) as a version of/reference to the refusal of honours by Augustus; see Harrill 2011.

<sup>30</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 36.

<sup>31</sup> Because that earlier refusal, while certainly intended positively, was consistently treated as an outrage by Cicero and subsequent Roman writers, it is not clear that it would have been available for positive citation, as Dio claims.

<sup>32</sup> On the inauguration of Tiberius in the Senate on 18 September 14 C.E., see Matthews 2010: 57–84 and Huttner 2004: 128–48.



long history in Rome, dating at least to the time of the Elder Scipio, whose famed rejection of a slate of exceptional honours in the aftermath of Zama, honours both religious and political, is cited by later moralists as proof of the man's praiseworthy moderation and good sense. Writing *de Moderatione*, Valerius Maximus concludes that Scipio 'advanced nearly as far in refusing honours as he had in earning them' ('paene tantum se in recusandis honoribus gessit quantum egerat in emerendis').<sup>33</sup> Roughly eighty years after Scipio's famous refusal Lucilius wrote at least one poetic *recusatio* (the first known *recusatio* in Latin poetry) which talked of wars and generalships, and appears to have had nothing to do with Callimachus.<sup>34</sup> Then again, more than two centuries later, in c. 107 C.E., the Younger Pliny wrote two letters to his friend Montanus venting the rage that overcame him when he happened to read an inscription that he saw posted on the tomb of M. Antonius Pallas, a freedman of the imperial house who rose to prominence as Claudius' secretary of finance (*a rationibus*). Pliny's animus is strangely focused, centring not on the vast sums that Pallas took, but the fifteen million he 'dared to refuse' ('ille furcifer et recipere ausus est et recusare', Plin., *Ep.* 7.29).<sup>35</sup> Even Trimalchio plays at being big enough to engage in recusational theatrics when he instructs his tomb-maker friend, Habinnas, to add to his funerary inscription that 'though he could have been a member of all the *decuriae* of Rome, he chose not to be'.<sup>36</sup>

My point is that recusational theatrics had a long and heavily scrutinized history in Rome as a tool for advertising one's moderation and hesitancy towards power.<sup>37</sup> And it is this tradition, which has no counterpart in the performative politics of the Hellenistic monarchs,<sup>38</sup> that Augustus taps into to help program his exceptional rule as an expression of traditional Roman values ('restraint' and 'self-control', *moderatio* and *temperantia*). And these are precisely the same values that so many poets of the period *received* as the aesthetic values exemplified by Callimachus — and here I am putting strong emphasis on reception as an active, purposeful, and highly selective process. In short: Callimachus received into the structures of Roman thought, where he is reconfigured by those structures and repurposed.<sup>39</sup> Such figuring, or perhaps I should say 'configuring' of the political symbolic by the literary (or this could work the other way around, see below), allows us to see Callimachus' self-control as a version of what good and important and 'achieving' Romans do. It tells us about how certain values are located in Callimachus by Roman poets, and selected from his (actually quite vast) poetic output, so as to make him

<sup>33</sup> Val. Max. 4.1.6; cf. Livy 38.56. Further on the *moderatio* displayed by Scipio's public refusal of honours, see Mueller 2002a: 78.

<sup>34</sup> The first Roman poet known to have written a poem refusing an invitation to write martial epic was Lucilius, who is strangely under-represented (sometimes completely omitted) in all the standard studies of *recusatio*. On the Lucilian *recusationes* of *Satires* Books 26 and 30 (bookending his earliest five-book set of published satires), see most recently Haß 2007: 204–14, citing extensive bibliography.

<sup>35</sup> Roller 2001: 271, referring to the *titulus* on Pallas' tomb: 'Pallas presents himself as exemplum of moderation (presumably by inscribing on his tomb, for posterity to read, the fact that he rejected these honours): for thus Pallas seeks to install himself as one of the *maiores*, an aristocratic ancestor notable for the honours conferred upon him.'

<sup>36</sup> Petr. 71.12: 'cum posset in omnibus decuriis Romae esse, tamen noluit.'

<sup>37</sup> See especially Huttner 2004, Béranger 1948, and Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

<sup>38</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 36–7: 'Alexander's successors advertised their magnificence by taking the title of *basileus*. Augustus and his successors advertised their magnificence more by what they refused than by what they accepted.' See also Ma 2008: 177 on the regal honours ceremoniously accepted by Antiochos III (The Great) in Babylon in 187 B.C.E.: 'sacrificing and prostrating himself in the great temple of Marduk, the Esagil, appearing before the assembled Babylonians, being presented with "a golden crown ... a golden box of Beltiya, and the purple garment of King Nebuchadnezzar".' Huttner 2004: 62–80 has collected what little evidence there is for staged refusals of power in Greek political practice to conclude that no compelling case can be made for the modelling of Roman practice on Greek precedent. Unmentioned by Huttner is the ostentatious refusal of divine honours by Agesilaus of Sparta; on which, see Flower 1988.

<sup>39</sup> On how the Roman reception of Callimachus involves Romans seeing themselves reflected in Callimachus, see Hunter 2006: 141–6.

receivable by them as such, as a certain kind of Roman, and thus who he is for us, by way of those poets who so obsessively lionize his achievements, and compare themselves to him.<sup>40</sup>

## II AUGUSTUS TO HORACE: SOLLICITING A LETTER FROM A ‘CLOSE FRIEND’ (*FAMILIARIS*)

The poets’ *recusationes*, like those of the emperors, are performed not behind the scenes, but squarely in the public eye. They are similarly discursive (back and forth negotiations), citational/intertextual, and repetitious. And they are similarly subject to charges of insincerity, especially in the case of poets whose refusals actually put on proud display the very talents and powers that the writer claims to lack. But in order to describe the cultural structuring of these poetic refusals, I would like first to go back to the altar that Augustus refused in 13 B.C.E., only to reconceive and dedicate it in a more agreeable location, and on his own terms, later in the same year. Scrolling forward from the lush celebrations that greeted the emperor upon his return in the summer of 13, we see that late in the same year, or perhaps very early in the next, Augustus seems to have found some time to read, or reread, certain of Horace’s *Sermones*, ‘conversations’, with friends; that is, his first book of epistles and/or his letter to Florus (2.2), but perhaps his satires as well. Suetonius tells us that upon reading these poems the emperor was put out. He writes to Horace as follows (Suet., *Vita Hor.* 43–9):

Irasci me tibi scito, quod non in plerisque eius modi scriptis mecum potissimum loquaris; an ueris ne apud posteros infame tibi sit, quod uidearis familiaris nobis esse?

Know good and well that I am angry at you because in the several writings you’ve produced in this genre you do not talk with me first and foremost. Or are you afraid that future generations will regard it as a scandal that you should seem to be my ‘familiaris’?

It was in response to this complaint, says Suetonius, that Augustus ‘forced out’ (*expressit*) the epistle to Augustus.<sup>41</sup> In fact, it is the specific question that Augustus put to Horace about how he thinks his legacy will be affected by his relationship to him, and vice versa, that Horace responds to in great detail at the end of the poem. Thus, whatever else Horace’s letter is and does, it responds to the letter that Augustus sent to him.

Elsewhere, drawing upon an insightful but overstated assertion by G. C. Fiske, I have argued that Horace patterns his introduction to Maecenas in *Sermones* 1.6 after that of Bion of Borysthene to Antigonus Gonatas.<sup>42</sup> As Bion himself related in his famous

<sup>40</sup> On the political *recusatio* potentially read as a rejection of moral obligations, see Gradel 2002: 59: ‘Honours were a way to define the status or social position of the person or god honoured, but it was also a way to tie him down. The bestowal of honours to someone socially superior, whether man or god, obliged him to return them with benefactions. Or, we might say, to rule well. It could indeed be honourable to reject excessive honours, and for example, the elder Scipio had excelled in this *gloria recusandi*. On the other hand, refusing honours also entailed rejecting the moral obligations that went with them, even to the point of recognizing no bonds whatsoever. So it would be socially irresponsible to reject all such proposals.’

<sup>41</sup> On the question of how and how far Augustus ‘pressured’ poets to write for him, see especially Griffin 1984.

<sup>42</sup> On the Bion analogy that patterns Horace’s relationship to ‘king’ Maecenas in the *Sermones* Book 1, see Gowers 2012: 216, Freudenburg 2010: 281–2, and 1993: 205–6; cf. Fiske 1920: 316: ‘the text of this satire is essentially that of Bion’s famous letter to Antigonus Gonatas.’ A measured view is that of Lejay 1911: 174. For a complete analysis of the Bion analogy in Horace, see now Moles 2007: 165–8: ‘Horace mobilizes a whole series of items to accentuate the Bion analogy ... readers are challenged to detect Bion’s presence’ (p. 167). On the packaging of both Lucilius and Horace as versions of the Hellenistic king’s confidant, see Labate 1996: 439. For the Hellenistic background that shows through the portrait of the statesman’s friend in Ennius, see Skutsch 1968: 92–4, and 1985: 450–1. On the ways in which these Greek categories of thought about the need for helpful, sometimes biting, free speech in various kinds of relationships are woven into discourses of friendship in Roman culture, with special attention to unequal relationships, see Habinek 1990.

letter to Antigonus, the first words out of the outspoken Cynic's mouth when he came into the king's presence were 'I am the son of a freed slave' (ἐμοὶ ὁ πατήρ μὲν ἦν ὀπελεύθερος, *DL* 4.46), the Greek equivalent of Horace's 'libertino patre natus', and that phrase is then repeated as the mantra of Bion's letter to Antigonus, just as it is for Horace in his address to Maecenas in *Sat.* 1.6.<sup>43</sup> Thus, what at one level looks like a simple assertion of autobiographical fact, at another level is a figurative rendering of that fact (or 'fact') that helps us structure the speaker's relationship to Maecenas in a certain, known way: Horace, this figure says, speaks truth to power the way that Bion the Cynic spoke to King Antigonus. And thus an entire, pre-existing theoretical apparatus that lionized such relationships between truth-telling philosophers and kings as both helpful and necessary (the 'king's confidant') comes into play in Book 1 of the *Sermones* to help us imagine the poet's outspokenness in the same terms. With that figure in play, Maecenas is thus seen as a regal figure (something Horace loves to play up) who not only allows himself to be criticized, but who actually demands that Horace tell him the truth, the way that Bion had once spoken straightforwardly, sometimes bitingly, to Antigonus Gonatas.

Perhaps the most famous example of Horace telling what would otherwise be painful truths to a powerful friend, and yet managing to keep that friend laughing and convinced of the truth-teller's good intentions, is the first letter of *Epistles* Book 1, the very book that caused Augustus to become irate (*irasci*) when he found that it contained no letter addressed to him. Near the end of *Epistles* 1.1 Horace points out that Maecenas is, bluntly stated, superficial: a meticulously coiffed man obsessed with appearances, and yet determined to scold others about how they live their lives, and free with detailed advice about what they might improve. Failing to penetrate into his poet friend's insides, where he might find something solid, valuable and attractive, Maecenas instead chooses to scold Horace for his uneven haircut and floppy shoes.<sup>44</sup> How do you tell a man as powerful and proud and stylish as Maecenas that he has no depth? The poem is a master class in how to do just that, a delicate balance of saying just enough, without saying too much, of speaking truthfully, but with a very light touch.<sup>45</sup>

But, given that this is how Horatian *sermo* operates, how, as Persius would later say, these poems get inside and play with some of the touchiest imperfections of the conversation's partners,<sup>46</sup> exactly what are we to make of Augustus' request that Horace write him an intimate, friendly *sermo*, as to a *familiaris*, like the ones he wrote to Maecenas, Tibullus, Florus, and so many others? Does Augustus really not see what that might entail? Has he no sense of how those letters operate? And if he does, can he really have expected that Horace would oblige him? That he would somehow find a way to needle him about some of his touchiest faults, to be devilishly critical and chatty with him, the *princeps*, who is by now worshipped as a god? These questions of mine have the look of rhetorical questions, but I pose them here as serious possibilities to be looked into. For too often, I think, this back and forth between Augustus and Horace is

<sup>43</sup> For the letter, see Kindstrand 1976.

<sup>44</sup> Hor., *Epist.* 1.1.94–105.

<sup>45</sup> On Horatian satire as a less aggressive form of *sermo* adjusted to the needs of maintaining civility among friends, while still managing to do real critical work, see especially the summary of Gowers 2012: 12–15.

<sup>46</sup> Persius 1.114–18 contrasts Lucilius' cynical 'bite' with the soft, friendly 'touch' of Horace:

secuit Lucilius urbem,  
te Lupe, te Muci, et genuinum fregit in illis. 115  
omne uaffer uitium ridenti Flaccus amico  
tangit et admissus circum praecordia ludit,  
callidus excusso populum suspendere naso.

Lucilius gashed/sliced into the city — you, Lupus, and you, Mucius — and he broke his molar on men such as these. His friend keeps right on laughing as crafty Flaccus touches his every defect, and once left in he plays around his insides, a man sneaky-smart at dangling a crowd from his well-blown nose.

interpreted heavy-handedly as a desire on Augustus' part to cash in on Horace's fame as a poet, especially now that Virgil and Varius are dead, and to use him, as a friend, to his maximum political effect.<sup>47</sup> As if Augustus were not satisfied with being mentioned 'merely' in one out of every five of Horace's *Odes*, and featured as the star concern of at least five of them.<sup>48</sup> The ageing autocrat wants more, to include a high profile endorsement in the letters as well.

But what I am proposing is another way (unprovable but quite possible) of reading the same facts; a way that does not take Augustus for a simple, scheming autocrat, but a rather clever and complex one. For if he does appreciate the way that these letters 'converse', sent as from one morally imperfect but well-meaning friend to another, telling that friend what he needs to hear, that may be exactly what Augustus is asking Horace to do: 'speak to me as *that* kind of friend', with the hidden political calculation behind the invitation being roughly: 'let's show the world that all is as it ever was in Rome; that, despite all the altars and incense that have surrounded my triumphal return, I am no autocrat who has to be flattered and lied to, but a man who seeks out advice from friends who tell me the truth, and that I can take hard criticism when it is due, and put to me in friendly, jective terms. If nothing else, this will show that I, like anyone else in Rome, have friends both high and low, whom I routinely consult on matters both great and small, seeking their *consilium* (thus adhering to that wonderful republican ideal) especially on those matters in which they happen to be more expert than I, such as poetry.' Poetry is Horace's particular expertise. And that is what his letter to Augustus is all about.

### III THE HORATIAN RESPONSE, PART I

As if inviting Horace to play, Augustus sends his poet-friend a disarmingly playful and familiar letter, pretending to be angry at him.<sup>49</sup> That is, he writes to him *the way he would like to be written back to*, exactly the way he had seen Horace write to so many others, as one needling old chum to another. If that, or something like it, lies behind Augustus' invitation, we can see from the first lines of Horace's letter how Augustus got the honest criticism he was asking for by way of having his overtures rebuffed. Horace writes (*Epist.* 2.1.1–22):

Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus,  
res Italas armis tuteris, moribus ornes,  
legibus emendes, in publica commoda peccem  
si longo sermone morer tua tempora, Caesar.

Now that you are all alone in shouldering duties so many and so great — Italy's affairs you safeguard with arms, distinguish with morals, correct with laws — it is the people's benefit that I would wrong should I slow with a long conversation the times that belong to you, Oh Caesar.

Augustus had asked for something conversational, similar to what he knew from those other poems of Horace, from friend to friend. He wrote to his friend in a flatteringly

<sup>47</sup> For example, White 1993: 114: 'He [Augustus] was reacting to the success of a literary initiative by Horace, whose *Epistles* established a new direction in poetry and at the same time were uniquely suited to put his friends on display. Augustus wanted to be identified with that success.'

<sup>48</sup> On the *Odes* concerned with Augustus, see Fraenkel 1957: 239–97.

<sup>49</sup> Excellent on the 'flattering familiarity' that is projected by Augustus in his letter to Horace, see Oliensis 1998: 111; cf. also Putnam 1986: 22: 'This is not the declaration of master to slave in a hierarchical relationship but the intimate, even jocular, interrogation of equal by equal or even of the person in power by his subordinate.' The tone is that of one old friend ribbing and cajoling another; cf. Fraenkel 1957: 383: 'Horace was probably very much gratified by the wish which Augustus uttered in such an engaging manner.'

relaxed and familiar tone, only to have that friend speak to him as if he (Horace) were not a dear old *familiaris*, but some awestruck functionary trembling in the presence of the most preternaturally powerful being on the planet, addressing him in a tone that would seem to prove just how absurd the very idea of an open and intimate conversation with Augustus had become.<sup>50</sup> The letter begins with the poet taking a deep and deferential bow and saying ‘excuse me, sir, I know that you are extremely busy — is this a good time? I hope it is, and I promise I’ll keep my conversation short’. Augustus made a playful first move in a back-and-forth game, expecting a familiar reply. Horace returns that volley with an (ironically?) overdone display of deferentiality bordering on obeisance, referring to his old friend as ‘Oh Caesar’. Then, with deferential apologies out of the way, he goes on for thirteen more lines to remind us of just how gigantic and unbreachable that gap in fact was separating Augustus not just from Horace, but from anyone else on the planet who had ever lived, telling us how he has proceeded along the cosmic *cursus honorum*, just as he had the terrestrial Roman one, faster than anyone in all known history, doing one better than even Hercules who had at least to wait until he was dead before having altars built to him and his divine *numen* worshipped.

These opening lines remind us that, when it came to proceeding along Rome’s honorific *cursus*, Augustus had always been a record-breaker; that since 43 B.C.E. he had been making his own time (‘tua tempora’), keeping his own calendar, and that he was not one to be slowed down. The first three words of Augustus’ *Res Gestae* are quick to dispense with the problem of Augustus’ speed by claiming it as a positive, a necessity brought on by the unrepudiated abuses of others: ‘I was nineteen years old (*annos undeuiginti natus*) when I mustered an army at my personal decision and at my personal expense, and with it I liberated the state.’ The deceased *princeps* then goes on to describe how he was given a seat in the Senate, as well as consular precedence in that seat, then in the same year appointed consul after the two incumbent consuls had fallen in war. No Roman had ever achieved so much, so quickly. At the tender age of nineteen, by the end of his first full year on Rome’s political scene, Octavian had already seized the top rung of the old *cursus*.

#### IV THE ‘WEIGHING’ OF HONOURS, ACCEPTED AND REFUSED

However funny and ‘off’ this opening laudation may sound by the standards of any other Horatian letter to a friend, it falls roughly within the bounds of the acceptable when viewed from the standards of the political rhetoric of 12 B.C.E. By the time of the emperor’s funeral oration in 14 C.E., Tiberius could compare Augustus’ exploits to those of Alexander and Romulus, as well as to the labours of Hercules (these are the main instances of men become gods cited by Horace in his letter) only to have Hercules come off looking less accomplished by comparison.<sup>51</sup> It is certain that, already by 12 B.C.E., the emperor’s

<sup>50</sup> Oliensis 1998: 191: ‘the epistle opens with deferential and even reverential praise of Augustus.’

<sup>51</sup> In his funeral oration of 14 C.E., Tiberius takes an equally aggressive approach to praising Augustus for achieving so much at such a young age. He claims that Augustus outperformed both Romulus and Alexander, both of whom were known to have done much at a young age. ‘With Hercules alone and his exploits I might compare him’, says Tiberius, ‘but even so I should fall short of my purpose, in so far as Hercules in childhood only dealt with serpents, and when a man, with a stag or two and a boar which he killed — oh, yes, and a lion ... whereas Augustus, not among beasts, but among men, of his own free will, by waging war and enacting laws, literally saved the commonwealth and gained splendid renown for himself’ (Dio 56.36.2–5). He continues on in this vein, following the same list of achievements, and in the same order as they were cited by Augustus at the beginning of his *Res Gestae*. These same three figures (Alexander, Romulus and Hercules) are used to figure Augustus’ achievements in Horace’s letter to Augustus. There again Augustus comes off favourably against them all, except that he risks slipping back to the mundane level of Alexander in that one area where, Horace says, Alexander most egregiously failed: literature. Further on Dio’s account of the funeral

official correspondence was replete with effusively deferential formalities, so it is easy to think that, in describing how Augustus has outraced even Hercules to achieve divine worship while still alive, Horace is simply rising to the occasion by tapping into enthusiasms and rhetorical conceits that were by this point certainly on the rise, if not actually widespread.<sup>52</sup> But whether such ideas were, as yet, judged generally acceptable and good ideas, let alone across all sectors of Roman political culture, is another matter altogether. And that is where I would like to do a little more probing of Horace's opening address. For if Horace is laying it on thick in the opening lines of the letter to Augustus, thicker than he does anywhere else in his poems, he does so in a way that is certain to have reminded some in his audience of just how shaky and tendentious Augustus' laudatory underpinnings were, and just how easily his praise could be taken for blame.

To show how this might be the case I introduce a short passage from Suetonius' life of Julius Caesar where the biographer follows his account of Caesar's famed 'restraint and clemency' ('*moderatio et clementia*') with even weightier proof of his lack of restraint, in a list of deeds and decrees that, for Suetonius, far 'outweigh' (*praegravant*) the evidence just adduced to prove him restrained (Suet., *Iul.* 76):

And yet his other deeds and decrees outweigh [his acts of moderation] so that he is reckoned to have abused his arbitrary powers and to have been justly cut down (*iure caesus*). For not only did he accept offices/honours that were excessive (*non enim honores modo nimios recepit*) — consulships one after another, dictatorship for life and perpetual censorship, besides taking 'Emperor' as his praenomen and 'Father of the Fatherland' as his cognomen, his statue set among those of Rome's kings and an elevated seat in the theatre — but he also allowed decrees to be passed distinguishing him with honours that exceed a human scale: a golden throne in the Senate and another before the tribunal, a ceremonial chariot and carrier (for parading his image) in the procession around the Circus, temples, altars, images alongside the gods, a ritual couch, a priest, the Luperci, the right to designate a month, and by his own name. In fact there were no honours that he did not take up and confer just as he pleased (*ac nullos non honores ad libidinem cepit et dedit*).<sup>53</sup>

Suetonius handles the question of Julius Caesar's restraint in much the same way that Livy analyses the moral qualities of Hannibal, as if 'weighing' evidence in the two pans of a scale, and Caesar's lack of restraint tips the scale heavily to one side.<sup>54</sup> What stands out here, in putting Suetonius' list of grievous abuses alongside Horace's list of Augustus' duties and honours, is just how much overlap there is between them; how one man's list

oration of Tiberius, arguing for the currency of the comparisons used by Tiberius among the Augustan poets, see Mueller 2002b: 316–19. *Contra* see Millar 1964: 101, who argues that Dio composed the funeral oration that he ascribes to Tiberius.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Dio 57.11.2 where the Rhodians are faulted for being too familiar in their correspondence with Tiberius (Rhodes was Tiberius' old haunt in 'retirement') by failing to conclude their letter to him with 'the customary formula about offering their prayers for his welfare'.

<sup>53</sup> The most flagrant of Caesar's 'divine' honours were voted to him in the last months of his life, when he was made a state divinity (*Divus Iulius*), given a state priest (*flamen*), a state temple, and a sacred *puluinar* for his image. Suetonius' account of these honours is confirmed by a contemporary source in Cic., *Phil.* 2.43.110, as well as by other late sources, such as Dio 44.4 and App., *BC* 2.106. Cf. also the fictionalized debate of Dio 52.35, where Maecenas urges Octavian, now that he is free of all enemies, to refuse all exceptional honours that are offered to him on the grounds that no subject ever votes extravagant honours from his own free will. Rather, Maecenas adds, 'since all such honours as a ruler receives he must receive from himself, he not only wins no commendation for the honour but becomes a laughing-stock besides'. Maecenas then goes on to specify that Octavian 'never permit gold or silver images' to be made of himself, and that he should never permit temples to be built to himself: 'from temples comes no enhancement of one's glory. For it is virtue that raises many men to the level of gods, and no man ever became a god by popular vote.'

<sup>54</sup> Livy 2.1.4: 'has tantas uiri uirtutes ingentia uitia aequabant'; cf. Sen., *Suas.* 6.22 performing a Livian 'weighing' of Livy's own virtues and vices: 'si quis tamen uirtutibus uitia pensarit, uir magnus ac memorabilis fuit.'

of honours well-deserved and duties taken on constitutes another's list of outrages. The bulk of Suetonius' evidence for Julius Caesar's having been 'justly cut down' (and here one can detect the sounds of a nasty jingle that was perhaps sung in the streets to celebrate Caesar's demise: *Iulius Caesar iure caesus*<sup>55</sup>) — the bulk of his evidence has to do not with the honours Caesar grabbed as he pleased (*ad libidinem cepit*) but with those he was willing to accept when offered (*honores ... nimios recepit*). As in the *Res Gestae*, a careful distinction is maintained between honours taken and honours accepted. But whereas in the *Res Gestae* these same verbs are usually negated ('non recepi') or cautiously hedged, in Caesar's case there is no list of *res non gestae* for Suetonius to cite, whether of things taken, or of things received. According to Suetonius, Caesar did not have the requisite restraint (*moderatio*) to refuse offices (*honores*) when offered. He did not know how to say no. And these honours he puts into two categories, escalating from traditional republican offices that were not extravagant in themselves but that became excessive when piled onto one man and extended into perpetuity, to honours of a loftier register, the bulk of which were decreed to him in the last months of his life, after the battle of Munda in March 45 B.C.E., and that, before Caesar, had otherwise belonged only to the gods.<sup>56</sup>

As mentioned above, the reason I wish to put Suetonius' list of Caesar's escalating outrages alongside the exceptional honours taken on by Augustus at the beginning of Horace's letter to Augustus is not to prove Horace ironic, but to show just how fragile Horace's kind words are *as* kind words; how his praise, put as it is, and just as kindly as it appears to be, could easily be taken for blame, because the terms of Augustus' blame were, in some sectors of the Roman world, exactly the same.<sup>57</sup> In the opening lines of the letter to Augustus, we are presented with the emperor dressed in the full regalia of a Hellenistic dynast, off to take in the accolades and incense of his own welcome home celebrations held on 4 July 13 B.C.E. Just back from crushing insurgencies in Spain, Germany and Gaul, he beams with a Herculean ('post labores') confidence, applauded by Horace for the labours he has shouldered and the honours that he has received. He is lauded as a god among mere mortals, deigning to stay with them for yet a little while, and to undertake their burdens. It is an extremely grand and impressive picture, as if painted by the most ardent of Augustus' supporters.<sup>58</sup> But within the fractious political world of Rome, this same list of duties taken on and honours granted constitutes another man's list of recusational failures: excessive, Greek-style honours that should have been said no to. It is worth pointing this out here because these same issues concerning the stability of a poet's praise arise again as topics openly discussed at the poem's end. There Horace treats the problem of praise being so 'ineptly' handled and so overdone that it lends itself to being repurposed as ridicule. Thus again, at the end of the poem, as at the beginning, we are invited to consider the fragility of kind words. And Horace insists that the poet must understand his own strengths in undertaking honour-rich projects, and that he must know enough about himself to refuse certain over-rich honours when offered. The similarities linking the honours shouldered at the beginning of the poem to those rejected at the end are pronounced, underscoring the

<sup>55</sup> Pelling 2009: 262 notes that Suetonius' account is strongly worded, 'and redolent of the Republican past, for "justly killed", "iure caesus", is the legal term used in cases of justifiable homicide: this is the language in which the lynching of the Gracchi had been excused'.

<sup>56</sup> On the steady escalation of honours that were offered to Caesar after the battle of Thapsus in 46 B.C.E., and that continued to the end of his life, see Gradel 2002: 54–72.

<sup>57</sup> So, too, in the case of a recent American president, George W. Bush, were I to cite his most noteworthy 'achievements', the very things that he and his supporters touted as evidence of his boldness and practical good sense in a time of crisis, I would inevitably be constructing what was/is for others the basic list of his most outrageous abuses.

<sup>58</sup> The question posed by the poem's end is: are the dazzling colours of such a flattering portrait caerulean, or Choerilan?

contrast between the emperor's acceptance of weighty honours and duties and the poet's refusal to take them on. With that contrast Horace may be taken to flatter Augustus. As if to say 'Clearly I am no match for you. You are a Hercules, capable of such a load, and I am a mere maker of chatty poems (*sermones*).' This is a fairly standard approach to the poem's concluding *recusatio*. But, taken as the truth-telling of a satirist who (as *amicus* and *familiaris*) genially needles and flays an old friend, the contrast might also be taken to produce a satiric point. As if to say 'Watch me, old friend. You used to be good at this, Rome's master practitioner of *recusatio*. Let me remind you how it's done!'

#### V THE HIDDEN POLITICS OF POETIC REFUSALS: SOME COMPARANDA

There are numerous poems that one might cite to show the political workings of poets putting on acts of refusal in Rome. More than twenty-five years ago, David Armstrong pointed out that in *Sermones* 1.6 Horace gives the powerful impression that he is rejecting an offer by Maecenas inviting him to run for the quaestorship, thereby to gain entry into the Senate, in the first year of his eligibility for the office.<sup>59</sup> Thus, in what turns out to be the first of many poems of refusal scattered throughout his long career, Horace says no not to the writing of a political poem, but to the taking of a political office. This is the unique instance of an Augustan *recusatio* wherein the political engagement that the poet eschews is not a metaphor (big laudatory poem avoided = political engagement avoided), but the real thing. And yet, however real the office is, the specific terms of Horace's political refusal in *Sermones* 1.6 can easily be appreciated for their metaphorical qualities; in a word, their Callimachean-ness, based as they are on a humble poet's determination to keep to his simple, uncomplicated and uncluttered ways, his personal unsuitability to the task that he is being invited to take on, and his unwillingness to take on a load that is too burdensome for him to bear. The poem gives us to see that, whether 'political' or 'poetic', the terms of the refusal are uncannily the same, and that might cause us to think twice about availing ourselves of these binaries in the first place. Instead of thinking that poets 'refer to' politics when they make their refusals in political terms (or when they accept tasks and/or describe their own achievements in political terms<sup>60</sup>), we might consider whether they are not working with the same cultural structure, as if availing themselves of the same handy tool in the Roman 'values' kit. Taken as such, their acts of denial will always defy our attempts to cleanly separate the aesthetic from the political, and vice versa. Certainly poets can, at times, remind us of how alike their refusals are to those of, say, an Augustus or Maecenas. That is, they can make obvious 'reference' to politics in that sense. But in doing so they are just bringing to the surface something that is always already there, built into the discursive fabric of Roman cultural language. In the end, their refusals are politically structured and resonant even when the poets who make them seem only to be talking about their aesthetic commitments, and nothing else.

One poem that is particularly relevant to Horace's *recusatio* in his letter to Augustus is the ninth elegy of Propertius' third book. It is a poem that cites Horace in its first lines, and that Horace cites in turn in making his polite refusal at the end of his letter to Augustus. Written in about 21 B.C.E., the poem carries a sting in its tail ('Propertius' most devastating undercutting of the Augustan literary establishment'<sup>61</sup>), in the parting lines where the poet notes that the 'distinction' (the *laus*) that Maecenas offers him by urging

<sup>59</sup> Armstrong 1986.

<sup>60</sup> cf. the clear political figuration of the poet's achievements *qua res gestae* in, e.g., the poem of Virg., *G.* 3, Hor., *Epist.* 1.19, or *Odes* 3.30.

<sup>61</sup> Sullivan 1976: 17.



him to leave elegy aside in order to sing of Rome's recent wars, and thus to be rewarded by Maecenas' support as patron (*fautor*), has the convenient side-effect of bringing high distinction to none other than Maecenas himself. Figuring himself as Maecenas' hard-driven steed (and in turn playing with the idea of Maecenas *qua* 'horseman'), Propertius writes in the poem's final lines:

[If you want] to support me [i.e. as patron], take a soft hold on the reins of my youthful endeavour, and give favourable signs to my wheels now that they've been launched [from the gate]. Here's the distinction you are 'granting' me, and that you have set out to give me: they will say that, of my own accord, I supported your cause.

'Your generous offer to me seems to pay you quite handsomely, and how awfully nice is that!' Propertius seems to say.<sup>62</sup>

Earlier in the poem Propertius offers several of the standard excuses that Augustan poets were wont to make in refusing to sing of the emperor's wars: my raft is too small to be fitted with big, wind-blown sails; it would shame me to take on a load too big, only to collapse under its weight; and so on. In rationalizing his refusal to Maecenas (just as Horace will do in his rationalization to Augustus) Propertius goes on to cite the precedent of famous Greek artists — Lysippus, Calamis, Apelles, Praxiteles, and several others — each of whom, Propertius says, became famous for 'following the seeds of his own nature' ('*naturae sequitur semina quisque suae*'). Calamis was brilliant at sculpting horses. Mys specialized in acanthus leaves, while Phidias sculpted the colossal statue of Olympian Zeus. They all knew their limits, in other words, and by keeping within them they achieved lasting fame. And several of these artists, we know, were made fabulously wealthy by their patrons, so there is perhaps a lesson here as well about how a patron's money is best spent; that is, by letting the artist do what he is best suited to do.

In what follows in lines 21–56, Propertius couches his refusal to write big poems on Rome's many wars in terms of Maecenas' own refusal to take up political office and fight them. Propertius writes (*Elegies* 3.9.21–56 *passim*):

At tua, Maecenas, uitae praecepta recepi,  
 cogor et exemplis te superare tuis.  
 cum tibi Romano dominas in honore secures  
 et liceat medio ponere iura foro ...  
 ... parcis et in tenuis humilem te colligis umbras:  
 uelorum plenos subtrahis ipse sinus ...  
 ... te duce uel Iouis arma canam caeloque minantem  
 Coeum et Phlegraeis Eurymedonta iugis;  
 eductosque pares siluestri ex ubere reges,  
 ordiar et caeso moenia firma Remo,  
 celsaque Romanis decerpta palatia tauris,  
 crescet et ingenium sub tua iussa meum;  
 prosequar et currus utroque ab litore ouantis,  
 Parthorum astutae tela remissa fugae,  
 claustraque Pelusi Romano subruta ferro,  
 Antonique grauis in sua fata manus.

But I have taken my precepts for living from you, Maecenas, and I am compelled by your own examples to surpass you. Although you might wield the axes of supreme rule by holding a Roman magistracy [i.e. as consul] and dispense justice in the middle of the Forum [i.e. as

<sup>62</sup> cf. Sullivan 1976: 17: 'this is Propertius' most devastating undercutting of the Augustan literary establishment and his most daring, if somewhat humorous, expression of opposition — and at Maecenas' expense. It satirizes Horace's dedication of his *Odes* by a far subtler poem.'

praetor] ... you take it easy and stay low, keeping to the shadows of a simple life: though they're stretched to the full, you pull in the folds of your sails ... But when you become a general I will sing of Jupiter's wars, of Coeus and Eurymedon threatening the heavens from the hills of Phlegra. I will tell of a pair of kings raised on wolf's milk, and of defensive walls made solid by the slaughter of Remus, and the heights of the Palatine hill grazed by Roman bulls, and my talent will grow to the height of your commands. I will escort your chariots with praise as they return from East and West, the shafts of the Parthians, crafty in flight, surrendered, and the defences of Pelusium undermined by Roman iron, and Antony's hand heavy in dealing death to himself.

The poet's refusal is both structured and justified by the political refusal of his addressee. 'If you wanted, you could be consul', says Propertius, 'or a praetor, and yet you choose to remain a knight.' Then he adds, 'when you become the general I am to sing of (*te duce*),<sup>63</sup> I will write your poem.'

In order to give shape to his refusal to step into the world of big politics by way of a big martial poem, and thereby to accept the 'distinction' that Maecenas offers to him, Propertius points to the world of political refusals, working Maecenas' own reluctance to accept the fasces and curule seats and palms of victory that are clearly all his for the taking into an explanation for how he, that is Propertius, as a writer of elegy, and not martial epic, is to be understood. He rejects Maecenas' offer by way of Maecenas' own refusal. He names Maecenas his exemplar. And something very similar, though less obvious, is to be observed at the end of Horace's letter to Augustus as well, where we find Horace folding the emperor's own recusational theatrics into his refusal to compose his *res gestae* by productively confusing the categories of 'poet' and 'prince'. In so doing, he deflects an offer tendered by the emperor that was, as it is here for Propertius, rich in distinction and rewards, but heavy in obligation; an offer that would force the poet to step into the world of Augustus' imperial wars, and to wage them in full-throated song.

There is an easy flow to be observed in Propertius' *recusatio* in 3.9 from the world of poetry to the world of politics, then back again into the world of poetry. As mentioned above, this ease of motion suggests that neither world is safely set off, one from the other; that these two types of refusal are perhaps not to be considered mere analogues, but structures built from one another, and into one another, as two facets of the same cultural structure. As a cultural practice we know this structure most obviously from the political theatrics of Augustus himself, and as a poetic gesture we know it most obviously from the poets who wrote refusal poems during his principate. And it is not, I think, just some strange coincidence that the two types of *recusatio* should proliferate at the same time. For, in the case of the Augustan poets, refusing big political projects is not just about flashing one's Callimachean credentials for all to see, thus committing those poets who make such refusals to certain high aesthetic ideals, as first defined by the Alexandrian poets — though it is always about that as well, and that is the way scholars have always talked about their refusals. It is, rather, about demonstrating one's fluency in Rome's cultural language by proving that you possess the requisite substance and self-standing to merit the solicitations of men of high standing, and that you know what to do when offered honours that make you stand out from everyone else, and that would obligate you to reciprocate in equal measure. In short, this is not just about being a good Callimachean, even when it is about that. It is always, at the same time, about being a good, moderate, self-aware Roman.

From the first poem of Statius' *Silvae* Book 4 one can derive a good sense of what kind of political advantages the emperor stood to gain by posing as Refuser-in-Chief, no matter

<sup>63</sup> cf. Hor., *Epist.* 18.61–2: 'Actia pugna / te duce per pueros hostili more refertur.' On Maecenas' refusal of high honours, see D'Arms 1981: 111, and cf. *Elegiae in Maecenatem* 1.31–2: 'maius erat potuisse tamen nec uelle triumphos, / maior res magnis abstinuisse fuit.'

how ridiculous such refusals, when repeated *ad nauseam*, might come to seem. In terms of the *mos maiorum* that all good emperors pretended to subscribe to, how could any statesman be considered modest rather than monstrous in deigning to take up seventeen consulships in succession? And yet that is exactly the scenario that Statius would have us imagine in this poem (*Siluae* 4.1.5–10, 31–9):

Let the laws of Latium exult! Rejoice, curule seats! And with greater pride let Rome strike the sky with her seven hills, and let Evander's hill celebrate beyond the rest. Look, the consul's axes are returning again: Caesar has said yes to the Senate's prayers, and the Senate rejoices to have conquered Caesar's modesty ... Augustus took up the fasces of Latium thirteen times over the years, but he began earning them late. In your youth you surpassed your grandfathers. And how many things do you refuse! How many you say no to! And yet you will be swayed, and you will grant this day many times to the Senate's prayers. A longer series awaits you ahead, and Rome, in her happy fortune, three and four times will grant you as many curule chairs. You will found another *saeculum* with me, and the altar of your aged father will be renewed. You will bear a thousand trophies, only permit the triumphs!

Despite all appearances, or so Statius repeatedly emphasizes, Domitian is reluctant to hold the office that he is taking up for the seventeenth time. His modesty has held him back. He has repeatedly said no ('*quanta recusas, quanta uetas!*'). And yet, eventually, the prayers of the Senate wear the well-meaning emperor down 'and the Senate rejoices to have conquered Caesar's modesty' ('*curia Caesareum gaudet uicisse pudorem*'). Clifford Ando has described the political gains to be made from such blatantly insincere refusals in this way, putting emphasis on what the Roman people gained as well. He writes: 'the theatrical refusal elicited from the people an expression of their *consensus* — a stylized expression of their *libertas* — and thus forced them actively to consent to his rule. It was precisely this universal *consensus* that separated the *auctoritas* of the *princeps* from the *imperium* of the magistrate.'<sup>64</sup> I bring this particular poem into my discussion of Horace's letter to Augustus because it is this same sense of 'shyness' or 'modesty' (*pudor*) that Horace will cite in choosing to deflect the emperor's offer of a grand epic project, claiming that the honour is greatly appreciated, but much too eye-catching and honour-bearing for him to pursue.<sup>65</sup>

#### VI THE HORATIAN RESPONSE, PART 2

Horace ends his letter to Augustus in a tone both far more prosaic and remarkably less deferential than the one he began with. He writes (*Epistles* 2.1.214–31 *passim*):

Verum age et his, qui se lectori credere malunt  
quam spectatoris fastidia ferre superbi,  
curam redde breuem, si munus Apolline dignum  
uis complere libris et uatibus addere calcar,<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ando 2000: 146–7.

<sup>65</sup> cf. the citation of the poet's *pudor* in the *recusatio* of *Odes* 1.6.9–12: 'dum pudor / imbellisque lyrae Musa potens uetat / laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas / culpa deterere ingeni.' On the manifold complexities of 'shame' (*pudor*) in ancient Rome, see Kaster 2005: 28–65, especially p. 29: 'Those who did not have what we would call (in a now slightly archaic turn of phrase) a "sense of shame" could not expect to gain much honour; those who valued honour most highly could expect to experience shame most intensely.' In Kaster's system the shame that finds poets shying away from big, honour-rich projects stems from a 'discreditable extension of the self', see pp. 42–5. On the distinction between *pudor* as a regulatory force and *pudicitia*, see Langlands 2006: 48–9 and 283.

<sup>66</sup> As equine metaphor, cf. Var., *Men.* 472K: 'uentus buccas uehementius sufflare et calcar admouere'; cf. Cic., *Att.* 6.1.5 I: 'quasi calcar admouet.'

ut studio maiore petant Helicon uirentem ...  
 ... Sed tamen est operae pretium cognoscere qualis  
 aedituos habeat belli spectata domique  
 Virtus, indigno non committenda poetae.

But come now, give some brief attention as well to those who prefer to entrust themselves to a reader rather than to put up with the disdain of an arrogant spectator, if you wish to fill that gift, worthy of Apollo, with books, and to apply the spur to the *uates* so that they attack Helicon's green heights with greater zeal ... But, even so, 'it pays the effort' to understand what sort of guides she should have for her temple,<sup>67</sup> now that she has been put on lavish display 'in war and at home': Virtue, who must not be entrusted to an unworthy poet.

In making the transition to the poem's concluding *recusatio*, Horace figures the emperor, most obviously, as a conquering general who dedicates a temple to the god who gave him victory and who then (still acting the general's part) 'spurs' his poets ('addere calcar') as a soldier would a reluctant horse, urging them to 'attack' ('petant') green Helicon with greater zeal ('studio maiore'). Helicon is here a lush foreign citadel seen, as it were, from an eager horse's eye-view ('Helicon uirentem').<sup>68</sup> The spoils of that victory (i.e. the taking of Helicon) the general's inspired poets will dedicate as monuments of the man's Virtus in the temple on the Palatine hill (the two hills, Helicon and the Palatine, are being connected here), as so many books installed on the shelves of the Palatine Library.<sup>69</sup> The language that describes the dedication of books in Augustus' new library also describes the *contents of those books as he expects them to be written*: full of patriotic martial content (the storming of citadels by daring Roman generals).<sup>70</sup> And this perhaps also tells us why his poets, the hard-driven horses in this scenario (as in Propertius 3.9), were hanging back and needed to be prodded; why the library's shelves were, as yet, so empty.

But there is another figure active here as well: that of Augustus as a god of poetic inspiration, playing Apollo to his own Palatine Apollo, by 'spurring' the divine prophet poets (the *uates*) who are his devoted servants, filling them with zeal, much the way Apollo takes control of the reluctant Sibyl in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, where the same horse-taming and goading metaphors are in play.<sup>71</sup> We have before us, then, here at the

<sup>67</sup> The rôle of poets here is reduced to that of the temple's tour guides. Feeney 1998: 114: 'As he introduces the section on the merits of various media to commemorate such individuals as Alexander and Augustus, he describes the poets as "aeditui", the "temple-keepers", of the "uirtus" of the great (229–31). The phrase is humble and self-deprecatory ... but it reveals Horace's awareness that it is he and Virgil and Varius (247) who will eventually be in control of the *Prince's* posthumous fate.' Figured as *aeditui*, the poets' job is to keep Virtue's votive monuments alive in memory by describing the great battles to which the friezes and statues (gesturally) refer, the heroes who won them, the spoils they took, and so on. This entire section is heavily informed by Ennius' *Annales*, especially by his account of the capture of Ambracia by Fulvius Nobilior and the subsequent building of the *aedes Herculis Musarum*. But the reference to Virtus as a temple minded by poets may also refer us to Scipio Aemilianus' building of a temple to Virtus after Numantia; see Crawford and Coarelli 1977.

<sup>68</sup> As a further confusion of high and low, the colour detail perhaps derives from the 'anti-recusational' proem of Virgil *Georgics* Book 3, where the poet, upon returning from Helicon's peak ('Aonio ... uertice') dedicates a temple 'in the green plain' ('uiridi in campo') beside the Mincius river, a verse remade from *Ecl.* 7.12–13 'hic uiridis tenera praetexit harundine ripas / Mincius'; cf. G. 2.199 the Mincius as 'herboso flumine'. On the proem as 'anti-*recusatio*' see Thomas 1988: 36. Virgil uses a form of the adjective *uirens* only once in the *Aeneid*, to describe a valley at the base of the underworld itself: 'At pater Anchises penitus conualle uirenti.' He uses it twice in the *Georgics* to refer to a river in Lucania (3.146 'est lucos Silari circa ilicibusque uirentem') and mossy pools (4.18 'at liquidi fontes et stagna uirentia musco').

<sup>69</sup> cf. Tatum 2000: 397 on Propertius 2.10.19–20 'haec ego castra sequar'; 'uates tua castra canendo / magnus ero': 'The plain of battle and the heights of Helicon are thus mapped onto one another, as a consequence of which there are two distinct vectors that define the motion toward epic in the world of Propertius 2.10.'

<sup>70</sup> On the phenomenon of Roman poets being figured through their heroes (thus through their own figuring), see Farrell 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Virg., *Aen.* 6. 77–80 and 100–1 (the 'equine' start and finish of the Sibyl's first speech): 'But the prophetess whom the bestriding god had not yet broken stormed about the cavern, trying to shake his influence from her

end of the poem much as at the beginning, an image of the emperor that is doubly exposed, at once both human and divine: Apollo Augustus. But this makes for a most unusual introduction to the poem's concluding *recusatio*, because as *Apollo* (keeping in mind the Apollo of Virgil's Sixth *Eclogue*) Augustus should be pinching ears and warning his poets to sing not of kings and battles ('reges et proelia') but songs that are slight, refined, and carefully controlled. As Alessandro Barchiesi has recently pointed out regarding the many expressions of refusal that are to be found scattered throughout the Augustan poets, 'the only frequently shared concept is that Apollo always mitigates against a higher genre than the one the poet practises'.<sup>72</sup> Here (being new to the job, I suppose) Augustus flouts that rule by spurring them to launch themselves full-bore into the fray; to sing of kings and battles. The question that follows from this, and that we are left to ponder as the poem concludes, is how do you capture such 'greatness' (*maiestas*), that of a man already a god, in song? How are poets chosen for this task, and what qualities, whether of *ingenium* or *ars*, make them worthy of it?

In making his refusal, Horace points out that when he was young the task of praising Augustus' achievements had been shared out among several poets, but that this duty (*officium*) was now falling 'heavily' on him, as so many citadels to be stormed and wars composed ('bella confecta'), now that Virgil and Varius were dead. But this is a task that Horace, quite unlike his counterpart in Augustus, who had been leagued with men-become-gods as a 'composer' of wars ('bella componunt') at the beginning of the poem, says 'no' to. Horace says 'no' because, he would have us believe, he is shy, and not Hercules enough to shoulder such a burden, and because the 'greatness' of Augustus ('tua maiestas', the first such use of 'your majesty' to refer to Rome's emperor<sup>73</sup>) is unwilling to accept a puny song.<sup>74</sup>

As if to prove his point, Horace provides a sampling of high praise that just barely holds together as praise, the most famous moment of which comes in line 256, 'et formidatam Parthis te principe Romam', which improves and modernizes Cicero's most famously vilified hexameter line, 'o fortunatam natam me consule Romam'.<sup>75</sup> Even in its improved form, the Horatian line manages to remind us that, in the wrong hands, when it is too obvious, too patriotically old-fashioned and too overdone, praise turns laughable, to become the stuff of vilified one-liners, easily memorized and passed about because they are set in verse. So says Horace in lines 261–3, giving a completely new turn to the poets' standard protestations of reluctance and/or unsuitability.<sup>76</sup> The infamous overtones of his 'et formidatam' (and there are likely other bad lines larded into this letter's end<sup>77</sup>) prove his point: far from lifting their subjects to the heavens, powerfully perfumed songs of overdone and much too overt praise wrap their heroes in infamy, like so much cast-off paper used to package and carry off (coffin-like) cheap spices and incense and pepper — stuffs hotly traded in the smelly Subura ('oh how the

breast, while all the more he tired her mad jaws, quelled her savage heart, and tamed her by his pressure ... Dark sayings muffling truths, the way Apollo pulled her up raging, or else whipped her on, digging the spurs beneath her breast (*stimulus sub pectore*)' (trans. R. Fitzgerald). Cf. Williams' commentary ad 79–80 'the image is from taming a horse (cf. *excussisse*)'.

<sup>72</sup> Barchiesi 2011: 519.

<sup>73</sup> Rudd 1989: notes ad 257–8 that Horace's 'maiestas ... tua' is 'the first example of "your majesty", which was to become formalized as "Your Majesty"'. See also Goldberg 2005: 186 n. 21.

<sup>74</sup> On the purposeful confusion of language of the poem's beginning and end (the political returning as the aesthetic), see Feeney 2009.

<sup>75</sup> On this allusion, see Allen 1956: 141, Courtney 1993: 159, and especially Barchiesi 1993: 155–8, and Lowrie 2002b.

<sup>76</sup> Barchiesi 1993: 155: 'Orazio dà una svolta nuova al procedimento della *recusatio*: non solo il poeta è, come al solito, impari (*iriluttante*) al compito di un epos celebrativo: il vero problema è che il risultato eventuale, un cattivo poema, danneggerebbe Augusto, finirebbe letteralmente per sfigurare la sua immagine.'

<sup>77</sup> e.g. in the awkward (Ennian) metrics of lines 254 and 257; see Goldberg 2005: 186–7.

rabble love it when Augustus parades about in a lion skin and soaks in accolades, as to a god!<sup>78</sup>) but guaranteed to assault the sensitive nose (Hor., *Epist.* 2.1.264–70):<sup>79</sup>

neque ficto  
in peius uoltu proponi cereus usquam  
nec praeu factis decorari uersibus opto,  
ne rubeam pingui donatus munere et una  
cum scriptore meo capsula porrectus operta  
deferar in uicum uendentem tus et odores  
et piper et quicquid chartis amicitur ineptis.

And I have no wish to be put on display anywhere in wax, with my face fashioned for the worse, lest I should turn pink upon receiving a gift/duty so fat, and together with my writer, laid out in a covered case, be swept off to the street selling incense and fragrances, as well as pepper and whatever else gets ‘clothed’ in pages that don’t fit.<sup>80</sup>

It matters that this letter begins with incense wafting from altars to Augustus, as to a god, and ends with incense and spices figured as funerary necessities, *munera* in *that* sense, used to cover the stench of an over-ripe poem’s corpse.<sup>81</sup> That last overpowering stench, a mix of the rotten and the sickeningly over-sweet, is what the bad panegyric poem leaves lingering behind, as both the writer and the hero he heralds are bundled off in its pages to be taken out with the trash — a great symbol for impermanence, this, but of a strangely ‘lingering’ kind; a symbol that, once again, invites us to consider just how fragile sweet words are as sweet words, and how quickly succulent stuffs, such as ripe peaches and fish, go bad. I mention this last possibility because, for those with the nose to sense it (and many have), there is the faint smell of old fish in this conclusion as well; that is, the mackerel that Catullus had wrapped in the ‘baggy tunics’ of Volusius’ over-loose *Annales*, those ‘shitty sheets’ that kept him holding his nose, in contrast to the pure perfume, the ‘myrrh’, of Cinna’s *Zmyrna*.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> cf. S. 1.6.15–16, on the political judgement of the common crowd: ‘populo, qui stultus honores / saepe dat indignis et famae seruit ineptus.’

<sup>79</sup> On the Catullan fish-wrap of these lines, see especially Barchiesi 1993, 158 (= 2001: 85), and Goldberg 2005, 187–8. For the subsequent re-use of the same imagery in Martial and Statius, see Seo 2009: 246–7.

<sup>80</sup> Many have noted that these lines reference the mackerel dressed in ‘baggy tunics’ (‘laxas ... tunicas’) of Catullus 95.8. On Panaetian person-theory repurposed (especially via metaphors of clothing) as Horatian aesthetic theory (as well as a theory of the self), see Fowler 2008: 101: ‘Horace’s philosophy is a very somatic philosophy — it is no accident that a central metaphor is that of what is *fitting*, whether the Cynic’s cloak or the rich man’s. And it is a philosophy constantly in revolt against *what doesn’t fit*.’ Cf. Cic., *de Orat.* 2.17ff. on ‘inept’ speech, which is as much (if not actually much more) a social calculation as it is an aesthetic one: ‘qui aut, tempus quid postulet, nescit, aut plura loquitur, aut se ostendat, aut eorum quibuscum est uel dignitatis uel commodi rationem non habet, aut denique in aliquo genere aut inconcinnus aut multus est, ineptus dicitur.’

<sup>81</sup> There are several *double entendres* based on *munus* in the poem’s concluding *recusatio*, all touching on the reciprocal nature of the poet’s performing a *munus* (‘assigned task or service’, OLD s.v. *munus* 1–4) to receive a *munus* (‘gift’, OLD 5–7) in turn. Thus the *munera* of line 246 are both tasks assigned by Augustus, and the commemorative poem-gifts given to him (with strong suggestions of their being funerary *munera*). A similar double meaning inheres in the phrase ‘multa dantis cum laude’, where the genitive *dantis* makes equally good sense as an objective genitive (‘accompanied by the giver’s lavish praise’, i.e. *Augustus praises them* for their efforts) or a subjective genitive (‘accompanied by lavish praise of the giver’, i.e. their works lavishly *praise Augustus*). The grammatical conundrum touches needlingly on the truth about the poets’ ‘gifts’ of praise in Rome: the grander the gift, the grander the reward; the fuller the poet’s praise, the fuller the patron’s praise of the poet; cf. Peirano 2012: 163 on a similar subjective/objective *double entendre* referencing a patron’s praise at *Laus Pisonis* 219–21: ‘nec enim me diuitis auri / imperiosa fames et habendi saeuia libido / impulerunt, sed laudis amor.’ On the complicated gift language of *Epist.* 2.1, see Feeney 2009: 382, n. 91. On fat gifts expecting fat poems, see Freudenburg 2006: 157–8.

<sup>82</sup> Goldberg 2005: 188 follows Barchiesi 2001: 85 in seeing in Horace’s incense and unguents an allusion to Cinna’s *Zmyrna*, which was the poem that Catullus ‘praised so lavishly at Volusius’ expense’.

The nose is fully engaged by the streets of Rome in these last lines; by vendors hawking their peppers and incense, strongly scented stuffs that any old shopper might haggle over and bundle into her bag. These are hardly the most fragrant and elevated notes to end on. And yet this is what Horace leaves Augustus, and us, to inhale in signing off. According to Cicero's Crassus, unlike the Greeks, who lavished their leaders — Epaminondas, Philip, and Alexander — with baskets of flowery prose while they were still living, the Romans were suitably stinting of praise for the living, but lavish with it when it came to honouring the dead.<sup>83</sup> Praise, for Romans of Crassus' traditional sort, belongs in the graveyard. This was the very problem Horace introduced in beginning his letter: Augustus, he says, is praised in a 'timely' way that was, for many, and using a typical Roman standard, much 'too soon' ('maturus honores');<sup>84</sup> worshipped while still alive. But poets, as this one last poet of Maecenas' canonical triad<sup>85</sup> points out, need to wait. To rise above the *invidia* of critical disdain, and to have their images fashioned and installed in temples, they must first be put in their narrow boxes and be indexed by small, summary grave-inscriptions that, along with their *imagines*, tell the world of their grand achievements: 'Ennius, he was wise and brave, a second Homer;<sup>86</sup> Caecilius claimed victory in *grauitas*, Terence in *ars*.'<sup>87</sup> Horace gives us his insider's tour of the bookstacks *qua* graveyard and hall of fame near the beginning of the poem, before stepping into the library's ample central hall to lecture us on the comparative silliness of Greek literature (the non-military fluff towards the back) and the noble Roman poets' value to the community (the *uates* on proud display up front) 'high-minded priest poets who praise the city's gods, correct our faults, teach our youth', and so on. It is above all this Roman civic-mindedness that is the most distinctive feature of the poem's literary history.<sup>88</sup> Horace plays at being this temple's learned and civic-minded tour-guide, the *aedituus* of Roman poetry's glistening new Pantheon, the Palatine library, and keeper of its lore. He plays at appreciating poetry for what Augustus wants it to be. That pedestrian word, *aedituus* (line 230), found nowhere else in Latin verse, serves here as solid performative proof of the point being made: that he is no Ennius, just the lowly caretaker who polishes his statue, a writer of *sermones* that creep along. Such a word,

<sup>83</sup> Cic., *De Orat.* 2.341: 'For their part the Greeks wrote praise works more for reading and entertainment, or for honouring some individual, than they were for use in the courts. Theirs are the books written in praise of Themistocles, Aristides, Agesilaus, Epaminondas, Philip, Alexander and others. But our Roman praise works, the ones we make use of in the forum, either offer small character testimonials, bare and without ornament, or they are written for funeral gatherings, an occasion that hardly lends itself to garnering praise for speech-making. And yet, seeing that we must use it from time to time, and sometimes we must actually write it, whether as C. Laelius wrote for Tubero for him to deliver in praise of his uncle Africanus, or so that we ourselves might be able to praise whomever we please in the manner of the Greeks, we too must treat this topic.'

<sup>84</sup> Unlike its synonym *tempestivus*, the adjective *maturus* can mean 'occurring at the proper time' (*OLD* s.v. 7) or 'occurring before the proper time' (*OLD* 9); cf. Ov., *Met.* 14.584 on the timing of Aeneas' apotheosis: 'tempestivus erat caelo Cythereius heros.'

<sup>85</sup> In the rhetoric of the poem's conclusion, Virgil, Varius and Horace correspond to the triad of Lysippus, Apelles and Choerilus, artists employed by Alexander to produce and glorify his image. As happens so often in his *Epistles*, Horace defuses the tension that accrues to his incisive criticism of his addressee by ending on a note of self-criticism and humour at his own expense. He indicates that *he* is the inept Choerilus of Maecenas' poetic triad, an artist not suited to the task Augustus would have him take on. The criticism thus turns from Augustus's *iudicium*, his being enamoured of praise poets and determined to fill his library with loud, patriotic poems, to Horace's ineptitude, and even his being squat and overweight.

<sup>86</sup> Klingner 2009: 340 points out that the phrase that Horace uses to describe Ennius in line 50 ('sapiens et fortis') is a quote from the funerary *titulus* of the elder Scipio (Barbatus, *CIL* I<sup>2</sup> 7. 2 'fortis uir sapiensque'). Thus, the tag that Horace (mimicking a reductive *criticus*) applies to Ennius he quotes from the very tomb where Ennius himself was (presumably) buried.

<sup>87</sup> Hor., *Epist.* 2.1.50 and 59: 'Ennius et sapiens et fortis et alter Homerus ... uincere Caecilius grauitate, Terentius arte.'

<sup>88</sup> See Lowrie 2002a. Barchiesi 2011: 530 comments on the civic-mindedness that infuses the critical views of *Epistles* 2.2: 'This model of a poet who is helpful to the community (the crucial new idea in the literary *Epistles*) follows after a critical distancing from the new Callimachuses of elegy.'

uttered in the wrong place, is just the thing to take the wind out of any high-flying martial song and bring its hero, 'una cum scriptore', crashing down. But the lowly word also invites us to take a cheapened view of another denizen of Apollo's temple, the priest poet (*uates*) who is inspired by the god to sing songs for *princeps* and country. In the figure of the *aedituus*, the *uates* of the *Odes*, especially Book 3, is demoted to the tour-guide and janitor of the temple of the emperor's Virtus, which is what the Palatine library has become. This, it seems, is what Augustus would make of him; what would become of that once grand ideal of a poet who is at once inspired and civically engaged, as well as measured and self-aware.

Along the way of conducting his brisk survey of Rome's most outstanding and patriotic poets, Horace makes clear that to make the canon, to have your waxen image installed in the library along with your books, you must first be boxed, indexed, and slid inside a narrow, dead-man's niche. Each tag is a *titulus* referencing virtues, 'victories', and achievements.<sup>89</sup> These are the library's rules: no matter how stunning, imaginative and uncategorizable your achievements, your poetic *res gestae*, you will be at the mercy of the library's keepers, the nattering *critici* who organize the library's canon and reduce great authors to their summary tags.<sup>90</sup> For it is they who will say who stays, who goes, and who must be regarded as *ineptus* because he just does not fit. They will lead the tours that tell of you. But this poem itself is a study in this poet's un-box-ability. As if to exemplify the dangers of which it speaks (of tumbling into a Boeotian swamp when you were aiming for that region's highest peak, Helicon<sup>91</sup>) the poem itself falls precipitously from the fragrant high of its beginning to the smelly low of its end, from the temple to the graveyard.<sup>92</sup> Such wild extremes, however 'tasteless' and 'unsuitable' (*ineptus*) they may seem from a controlling librarian's standpoint ('Where do I go with this thing? Is it a fawning letter to a dynast or isn't it? A literary history? A satire?') from another standpoint are perfectly suited to the wild imbalances of its addressee,

<sup>89</sup> See above nn. 83 and 84.

<sup>90</sup> Feeney 2009: 371: 'Horace derides the thumbnail one-word summing up of an author's essential characteristics.' Rudd 1989: ad v.51 'ut critici dicunt' comments: 'the critics are not named, but one may safely assume that H. was thinking mainly of M. Terentius Varro, who had died in 27 B.C. at the age of 90.' According to Plin., *HN* 7.30.115, Marcus Terentius Varro was the sole living writer to have his portrait bust installed in Pollio's library (Rome's first public library, from the spoils of his Illyrian campaigns in 39 B.C.E.): 'M. Varronis in bibliotheca, qua prima in orbe ab Asinio Pollione ex manubiis publicata Romae est, unius uiuentis posita imago est'; see Goldberg 2005: 193; cf. Plin., *HN* 35.2.9–10 on the 'dedication' of portrait statues as if in memory of the writers' 'immortal souls': 'in bibliothecis dicantur illis, quorum immortales animae in locis iisdem loquuntur.'

<sup>91</sup> The point of Boeotia's 'thick air' ('crasso aere') in line 244 is not just that Alexander ends up seeming 'thick' in his judgements by way of the laudatory poems he commissioned, but that he is condemned to look bad *simply by being held to his own standards*, i.e. the standards set by the exceptionally refined *iudicium* he himself displayed in judging works of visual art, thus choosing to designate Lysippus and Apelles his chief artisans. Built into these lines is a stretched pun, impossible to translate, connecting Boeotia's 'crasso aere' 'thick air' to the bronzes ('aera') just mentioned four lines above: as if Choerilus has cast a bronze statue of Alexander and offered it as a votive gift to the Muses in their temple. But the likeness of his bronze is so grandiloquent and, so to speak, 'clunky' (*OLD* s.v. *crassus* 7) that it resembles not 'brave Alexander' but a lowland farmer from Boeotia ('Cow Town'), with the thickness of the region's air implying not just the clunkiness of Choerilus' representation but the 'thickness' (in terms of the *iudicium* he displayed in choosing such a poet) of the one it represents. Here, just as at the end of the poem, both the artist and the one he has represented are made to look stupid by a bad poem. According to the metaphor of these lines, both have breathed Boeotia's 'thick air', which is also to say that they have kept to the region's swampy lowlands, never ascending to the rarified, inspirational heights of Boeotia's most famous mountain, Helicon, home of the Muses. Ahl 1984: 58 points out that 'there is a savage sting in this last remark, not only because Boeotians were proverbially stupid, but because Alexander had totally destroyed Boeotia's chief city, Thebes'. On the poetic valence of the landscape highs and lows of Helicon, see Tatum 2000 on the 'failed ascent' of Propertius 2.10 ('nondum etiam Asraeos norunt mea carmina fontes, / sed modo Permessi flumine lauit Amor,' 25–6).

<sup>92</sup> Noted by Goldberg 2005: 188: 'This ironic, yet confident conclusion demands reconciliation with the poem's didactic and almost querulous beginning.'



the emperor himself ('Where do I go with *you*, Augustus? Set up in bronze in the ante-chamber of Agrippa's Pantheon, is that saying 'yes' to being a god on earth, or 'no'? Does that make you an honoured republican statesman and one of us? A Hellenistic dynast? A Hercules? To what genre do you belong?'). There is no pre-made slot on the library's shelves into which this poem can slide, and no one-line *titulus* that can capture its contents. In ending as pungently and as free-speakingly as it does, this poem captures the full conundrum of its addressee. And in so doing it also manages to become the one thing it had not quite managed to be from the start, though it certainly needed to be this, because it is what Augustus wanted: a straight-talking and incisive *sermo*, a *letter* to a friend.

APPENDIX: SELECTED *RECUSATIONES* OF OCTAVIAN/AUGUSTUS

Below, from Dio's account of Octavian's political career to 3 C.E., is an incomplete list of exceptional honours offered to Augustus only to be modified and/or refused by him. Interspersed among these summaries are quotations from the English translation of G. P. Goold's Loeb edition. For other accounts of the *recusationes* of Augustus and Tiberius, see *Res Gestae* 4, 5, 6, 10, 21; Suet., *Aug.* 58; Vell. 2.124; Tac., *Ann.* 1.11ff.; Suet., *Tib.* 24; and cf. S. J. Green (2004) on Ovid, *Fast.* 1.533 'licet ipse recuset'. A useful inventory of the ancient sources for Roman imperial *recusationes*, beginning with Augustus, is Béranger 1953: 139–40.

1. 36 B.C.E. (Dio 49.15): having been voted multiple honours after his defeat of Sextus Pompey, including statues, votes of praise, the privilege of wearing a laurel crown, etc., Caesar 'declined some of the honours ... and refused to accept the priesthood of Lepidus'.
2. 30 B.C.E. (Dio 51.19): vast and varied honours voted to Octavian after Actian victory, to include his being prayed for by the priests and priestesses in their prayers on behalf of the People and Senate, and at all banquets, both private and public, where 'everybody was to pour a libation to him'.
3. Early 29 B.C.E. (Dio 51.20): after Caesar's Parthian victory numerous honours were added to those of the previous year, including 'that his name should be included in their hymns equally with those of the gods'. 'All but a few' of these honours he accepted, but he rejected the proposal 'that the whole population of the city should go out to meet him'. Caesar in addition permitted the chief cities of Asia and Bithynia, Ephesus and Nicaea, to build temples to 'Rome' and 'Caesar'. Romans living in those cities were commanded to worship these two divinities, 'but he permitted the aliens, whom he styled Hellenes, to consecrate precincts to himself'.
4. 13 January 27 B.C.E.: Octavian offers to return full authority over the state to the Senate and People of Rome, citing his father's refusal of the monarchy that was offered to him at the Lupercalia of 15 February 44 B.C.E. See Dio 53.6–7: 'that he thrust that supremacy aside when it was offered him and that I return it after it has been given me — that, I say, transcends the deeds of a man!' Three days later, on 16 January, Octavian is awarded the title Augustus. As a false gesture, see Dio 53.11.
5. 25 B.C.E. (Dio 53.27): Augustus refuses Agrippa's wish to place a statue of him in his (i.e. Agrippa's) newly constructed Pantheon, and to have the building itself named after him. Instead Augustus allows him to put a statue of Julius Caesar inside, and statues of himself (Augustus) and Agrippa in the temple's ante-chamber.
6. January 21 B.C.E. (Dio 53.6): Augustus (settling affairs in Sicily and the East) refuses to accept one of the two consulships, which had been reserved for him. He will refuse the same offer in January 19 B.C.E. (Dio 54.10).
7. 19 B.C.E. (Dio 54.10): 'numerous honours of all sorts' are voted to Augustus upon his return to the city, 'none of which he would accept, save the founding of an altar to Fortuna Redux ... and

- the provision that the day on which he arrived should be numbered among the holidays and be called Augustalia'. In the same year he 'accepted an election ... to the position of supervisor of morals for five years, and took the authority of censor for the same period and that of consul for life' (thus he had the legal means to deliver his *Leges Augustae*). Later in the same year Agrippa refused to accept a triumph for his victories over the Cantabri, 'although one was voted at the behest of Augustus' (54.11; cf. 54.24 for a similar refusal in 14 B.C.E.).
8. 13 B.C.E. (Dio 54.25): 'the Senate voted to place an altar in the Senate chamber itself, to commemorate the return of Augustus [sc. from Gaul, Germany and Spain] and also voted that those who approached him as suppliants while he was inside the *pomerium* should not be punished. Nevertheless, he accepted neither of these honours.' Baths and barbers were opened *gratis* to all, and Augustus read out his most recent military achievements in the Senate. The rest of the year was spent in busy administration: reorganizing service requirements and pay for veterans, purging the Senate lists, etc. Late in the same year, 'on the death of Lepidus [the Triumvir] he was appointed high priest [pontifex maximus] and the Senate accordingly wished to vote him ... [break in text] ... but he declared that he would not accept any of them, and when the senators urged him, he rose and left the meeting'.
  9. Early 12 B.C.E. (Dio 54.28): in describing the 'curtaining' of the corpse at Agrippa's funeral, Dio expresses confusion whether Augustus needed to do this because he was high priest or because he was censor. After Agrippa's death (54.30) 'Augustus was chosen supervisor and corrector of morals for another five years'.
  10. 11 B.C.E. (Dio 54.35): the Senate and People collected money for statues of Augustus, which he took but instead used to set up statues of *Salus Publica*, *Concordia* and *Pax*. Dio relates that the citizens were 'nearly always' collecting money for this purpose to give to him on the first of the year, and that he would return it to them doubled or more. Honours were voted to Octavia upon her death, some of which were rejected by Augustus.
  11. 2 B.C.E. (Dio 55.10): Augustus named *pater patriae* by decree (apparently a formal validation of long-standing practice). For a much fuller account of Augustus' initial refusals of the honorific cognomen ('quia non recipiebat'), ending in a teary acceptance of the title in the Senate, see Suet., *Aug.* 58.
  12. 3 C.E. (Dio 55.12): by decree Augustus forbids anyone to address him as 'master' (*despotes*, *dominus*). He accepts a ten-year command for a fourth time, feigning compulsion, according to Dio.

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