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Introduction

At an important transition within the *Ars Poetica* Horace announces that he himself will abandon poetry, because (thanks to appropriate purges) he does not suffer from inspired madness; instead he will become a Professor of Creative Writing: 2006b====

> ergo fungar uice cotis, acutum
> reddere quae ferrum ualet exsors ipsa secandi;
> munus et officium, nil scribens ipse, docebo,
> unde parentur opes, quid alat formetque poetam,
> quid deceat, quid non, quo uirtus, quo ferat error.
> (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 304–8)

Thus I'll play the part of a whetstone, which can sharpen iron, though it itself cannot cut. I will write nothing myself, but will teach the office and task of the poet – the source of his material, what nurtures and shapes him, what he should do and what not, where virtue leads, and where error.

Horace here plays, as he does in the *Satires*, with the allegedly 'un-poetic' nature of verse, particularly didactic verse, on banal or technical subjects,[1] but what might strike a modern reader is the strongly educational, not to say moralising flavour of Horace's treatment both of the writing of poetry and of his rôle as a teacher. Horace's attitude, as we shall see throughout this book, is not in fact untypical for antiquity, but, typically also, Horace's is no conventional handling of traditional material.

By Horace's day poetry had been the basis of the early stages of education for several centuries and was to continue in this rôle; it was, as for example Plutarch's essay 'How the young man should study poetry' clearly demonstrates,[2] poetry which 'taught' young men their *munera et officia*, and which thus 'nurtured' and 'shaped' them. Although one of the rôles which 'didactic' writing often imposes upon its audience is that of being

[1] For related issues in other didactic verse see Hunter 2006b.
[2] See Chapter 6 below.

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children,[3] and although Horace elsewhere stresses the youth of the Pisones to whom the *Ars* is addressed (see v. 366), writing about poetry itself is a special case, for poetry lay at the heart of 'classical' education. Horace gives emphasis to the point immediately afterwards by his description of the Roman obsession with arithmetic and money in primary education (vv. 325–32), where there is a clear, if implicit, comparison with the stress in Greek education upon poetry and the development of stylistic skills (cf. vv. 323–5). In the passage under discussion Horace has turned the relationship of poetry and education around so that it is now the child poet who needs to be instructed, to be 'nurtured' and 'shaped'. We may be reminded of the famous anecdote in which Virgil is said to have described his pattern of working on the *Georgics* as 'licking the poem into shape', as a mother bear was said to lick her formless young into shape;[4] in Horace, it is the poet himself, not the poems, who needs this treatment.

Our earliest explicit witness to the discourse which Horace assumes is the analogy which the Aristophanic Aeschylus draws between the rôle of schoolteachers for children and that of poets for adults (*Frogs* 1054–5). In Horace's text the influence of the critical and ethical theory of the intervening centuries is very obvious, but it is the *Frogs* which, at least for us and, to an important extent, for antiquity as well, set the parameters of discussion. The reader of ancient critical texts is constantly confronted and perhaps surprised by his or her memories of the *Frogs*; whether these are in fact deliberate textual memories or echoes is often difficult to determine and will sometimes not, in any case, be the most important question about the textual relationship. For us the *Frogs* dramatises, as Plato's *Protagoras* was to do some years later, the emergence of a language of literary criticism[5] and the emergence of the critic; as with the closely related satire of intellectual movements in the *Clouds*, Aristophanes no doubt had in mind in the *Frogs* real contemporary developments, and probably also comic predecessors, but the state of our evidence means that we will never be able to proceed beyond discerning the tantalising traces of the outline of a history of the ideas which for us first surface in the *Frogs*. One of the aims of this book is to make some of those traces more visible. However influential the *Frogs* undoubtedly was at different periods of ancient thinking about literature and its heritage, a confrontation between the comedy and the

[3] Hence Lucretius' famous simile of 'the honey round the cup' (1.935–50), see below p. 188.
[4] Suetonius, *De Poetis* 23.90 Rostagni; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 17.10; see below p. 162; the verbs used in the anecdote are *fingere*, *effingere* and *conformare*.
[5] For some of the problems with assessing the *Frogs* in this regard see Dover 1993: 32–3; Willi 2003: 87–94.

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later tradition must be aimed not principally at the usually hopeless task of trying to establish clear lines of descent, but rather at seeing whether patterns of similarity can have an explanatory power for both the comedy and the later texts. Examples are scattered throughout this book, but a few cases here may illustrate some of the different issues which arise. I begin by returning to the passage of Horace from which I started.

Poets have a *munus et officium*, just as all craftsmen have a 'function', an ἔργον, which it is theirs to perform: this is what they do.[6] Horace's language is, however, tinged both with the imperative force of an appeal to traditional Roman values and with a moral earnestness which lifts the poet's rôle beyond the neutrality of 'function' or ἔργον, and indeed beyond modern ideas of what poetry is: this is also what poets *should* do. Both the prescriptive language and the moral earnestness take us back again to the Aristophanic Aeschylus and to his perception of the rôle of poetry in society: ταῦτα γὰρ ἄνδρας χρὴ ποιητὰς ἀσκεῖν, 'this is what poets *should* work at' (*Frogs* 1030). The realignment of language and ideas that are used to depict social or ethical positions towards more purely rhetorical or literary virtues is another familiar pattern of ancient criticism, and one which we will meet again.

Horace picks up the 'duty' of the poet in verses 333–4 when he considers the two possible aims which a poet might have:

> aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae
> aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae.
> (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 333–4)

Poets aim to be of benefit or to give delight or simultaneously to say things which are both pleasing and appropriate for life.

A whole book could of course be written on the origins and development of this triad of aims in ancient poetry and thinking about poetry, but though Horace may well have his eye on Hellenistic critics such as Neoptolemus,[7] the *Frogs* too demands our attention. One of Aeschylus' claims for the beneficial rôle of his poetry is based on the effect of *Persians*:

> Αι. εἶτα διδάξας Πέρσας μετὰ τοῦτ' ἐπιθυμεῖν ἐξεδίδαξα
> νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους, κοσμήσας ἔργον ἄριστον.
> Δι. ἐχάρην γοῦν, ἡνίκ' + ἤκουσα περὶ + Δαρείου τεθνεῶτος,
> ὁ χόρος δ' εὐθὺς τὼ χεῖρ' ὠδὶ συγκρούσας εἶπεν 'ἰαυοῖ'.
> (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1026–9)

[6] See Brink on v. 306; Norden 1905: 498–502.
[7] See Brink 1971: 352–3, citing Neoptolemus as quoted by Philodemus, *On Poems* V xvi.10–14 Mangoni.

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AESCH. Then after this by putting on (*didaxas*) *The Persians* I taught (*exedidaxa*) the Athenians to want always to defeat the enemy, by celebrating a most heroic deed.

DION. I certainly enjoyed it when . . . the dead Darius, and the chorus immediately knocked its hands together like this and cried 'iau!'

Here then is the Horatian dichotomy with an added twist: the same poem can be instructive and pleasurable, but it can be so for different sections of its audience.[8] The critical dichotomy had almost certainly not been formulated in stark Horatian terms as early as the late fifth century, but the Aristophanic context here is precisely the social rôle of poetry, how poets 'make men better in the cities' (*Frogs* 1009–10), and 'pleasure' too had long been central to thinking about how audiences react to poetry; as so often, what later becomes explicit is already woven into the fabric of the *Frogs*. Moreover, Horace's apparent gloss on being beneficial, 'saying things appropriate for life', embraces a very wide range of subject matter: the *Iliad* meets the requirement because, however unlikely it is that we will find ourselves in the position of an Agamemnon or an Achilles, the emotions and ethical choices of the characters carry lessons for the most humble of us, as the whole ancient scholiastic tradition amply attests. Nevertheless, the phrase also evokes a closeness between the subject matter of poetry and our own lives, and here it seems hard not to remember the boast of the Aristophanic Euripides that he brought tragedy within the understanding of the audience by introducing οἰκεῖα πράγματα, 'familiar', but also 'appropriate' things (*Frogs* 959), things *idonea uitae* we might well say.[9] Some of the questions which both Euripides (implicitly) and modern critics (explicitly) have asked about Aeschylus' catalogue of the benefits of poets to society (*Frogs* 1031–6)[10] are already posed by Horace's choice of language: in what does the benefit of poets for our own lives actually exist? We shall return to the question.[11]

The language and imagery of ancient criticism is remarkably persistent over time. The 'weighing scene' of *Frogs* may be indebted to Aeschylus' *Psychostasia*, in which the souls of Achilles and Memnon were weighed against each other on Zeus's scales and 'on one side Thetis, on the other Eos, pleaded for their sons who were fighting' (Plutarch, 'How the young man . . . ' 17a),[12] but it also very probably illustrates the typically Aristophanic phenomenon of the literalisation of an existing metaphorical

[8] On this distinction in *Frogs* see further below pp. 25–9, 37–8.
[9] On this phrase see below pp. 18–20. [10] See below p. 49. [11] See below pp. 48–52.
[12] For a full account of the testimonia see *TrGF* vol. III, pp. 374–5.

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language;[13] intellectual 'weighing up' becomes physical measurement. In its turn, the 'weighing scene' might have influenced the critical terminology which followed it. Tristano Gargiulo has attractively suggested that καθέλκειν 'draws down', used in a very difficult passage of the prologue of Callimachus' *Aitia* (fr. 1.9) of the opposition between two poems, borrows and reverses, as well as 're-metaphorising', the image of the *Frogs*.[14] Be that as it may, we may also sense the *Frogs* somewhere behind Plutarch's advice that one way of counteracting the potentially baneful influence of morally dubious passages of literature is to point out to young readers that there are other quotations which can be used as a balance, 'so that the scales incline to the better side' (Plutarch, 'How the young man . . . ' 21d). There is here (once again) a shared heritage whose exact development we can no longer trace.

As a second case, we may consider a small example of the familiar critical problem of the relationship between a poet's character and the style of his poetry, a problem in which Aristophanes revels, for example, in his portrayal of Agathon in *Thesmophoriazousai*. In the *Frogs* Aeschylus is reluctant to enter debate and falls into brooding silence (like, of course, one of his own characters, as the comic Euripides would have us believe).[15] At one point Dionysus has to urge him to 'answer the question':

> Αἰσχύλε, λέξον μηδ' αὐθάδως σεμνυνόμενος χαλέπαινε.
> (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1020)

Aeschylus, speak and don't get annoyed – all self-willed and haughty!

αὐθάδεια, a surly refusal to 'go with the crowd', is ascribed to Aeschylus in part because it is an Achillean characteristic which distinguishes him from Euripides, who is portrayed as only too keen to ingratiate himself with popular taste. It was, however, also to become a stylistic term, and one well suited to Aeschylean style.[16] For Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the 'austere style', of which Aeschylus was the pre-eminent tragic example, had a beauty marked by 'an archaic and self-willed flavour' (ἀρχαικὸν δέ τι καὶ αὔθαδες ἐπιδείκνυται κάλλος, *On the Arrangement of Words* 22.35),[17] and Dio Chrysostom too finds in Aeschylus 'great nobility and an archaic flavour, and a self-willed (αὔθαδες) quality to the thought and diction' (52.4, 15).[18]

[13] The most familiar example is probably the 'King's Eye' of the *Acharnians*. Another way of putting this would be to see a comic 'confusion' of the literal and metaphorical senses of σταθμάω (*Frogs* 797, see LSJ s.v.).
[14] Gargiulo 1992. [15] See further below. [16] See, e.g., Müller 2000: 259–60.
[17] 'Longinus', *On the Sublime* 22.3 applies the term, as does Dionysius elsewhere, to Thucydides.
[18] On this speech of Dio see further below pp. 39–48.

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Here the sense of a link between Aristophanes' portrayal of the poet and later critical terminology is strong; both the Aristophanic Euripides (vv. 924–34) and the later tradition comment on the 'idiosyncratic' nature of the Aeschylean poetic lexicon (cf. Dion. Hal. *On Imitation* 2.10 Aujac: ποιητὴς ἰδίων ὀνομάτων καὶ πραγμάτων, 'a poet/creator of words and things which belong only to him'), and at *Frogs* 837 Euripides himself calls Aeschylus αὐθαδόστομος. What the nature of that link is, we are unlikely ever to be able to explicate in full,[19] but it would also be naïve simply to ignore the possibility that Aristophanes himself has here picked something up from what seems to have been an explosion of 'critical' terminology at the end of the fifth century.

Aeschylus' initial silence itself (*Frogs* 832) and the silences which Euripides accuses him of having introduced into his plays (*Frogs* 911–20) both had a long history and were to have an illustrious future.[20] Although Aeschylus is, in the first place, playing out the rôle of his own Achilles, the most famous silence in Greek literature was, and was to remain, that of the ghost of Ajax before Odysseus in the Underworld in *Odyssey* 11. Like the Aristophanic Aeschylus, the ghost of Ajax is angry (the point is made with remarkable insistence, *Odyssey* 11.544, 554, 562, 565), and both anger and silence could be, in the later tradition, grand, sublime effects, and thus very much in keeping with the 'grand–plain' critical dichotomy at the head of which the *Frogs* stands. Virgil was, of course, to use the Homeric scene to write one of the most 'sublime' of all passages, Dido's silence before Aeneas in the Underworld.[21] 'Longinus' describes Ajax's silence as 'grand and more sublime than any words' (*On the Sublime* 9.2) and uses it to illustrate his aphorism that 'sublimity is the echo of greatness of mind' (μεγαλοφροσύνη);[22] silence was then to have an important rôle in eighteenth-century discussions of the sublime.[23] When the scholiast on *Odyssey* 11.563 ('So I spoke, but he made no answer . . .') observes that Ajax's silence is 'better than the speeches in tragedy', it is hard perhaps

[19] Willi 2003: 59 is rightly cautious about this example, but the matter is more complex than he represents it.

[20] The fullest discussion of Aeschylean practice itself in this matter remains Taplin 1972.

[21] *Aeneid* 6.469, *illa solo fixos oculos auersa tenebat*, perhaps picks up the Argonauts' stunned reaction to the appearance of the solar Apollo at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.683 (on this passage see below pp. 143–9); if so, the appearance of Dido in the Underworld is framed by two 'sublime' moments taken from the *Argonautica* (vv. 452–4 deriving from *Argon.* 4.1477–80), and Dido's first and last glimpses of Aeneas cast him as the brilliant sun-god (cf. *Aeneid* 1.586–93). For Dido and Aeneas as the moon and the sun more generally see Hardie 2006.

[22] On 'Longinus'' view of Ajax's silence see Halliwell 2003: 72–4.

[23] See Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* . . . Part II, Section VI (= Burke 1958: 70–1). On silence, anger and 'sublimity' see further below pp. 145–6.

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not to recall Dionysus' reaction to Euripides' denunciation of Aeschylean silences:

> ἐγὼ δ' ἔχαιρον τῆι σιωπῆι, καί με τοῦτ' ἔτερπεν
> οὐχ ἧττον ἢ νῦν οἱ λαλοῦντες.
> (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 916–17)

I liked the silence – I got no less pleasure from it than from the modern chatterboxes!

Just as no single pattern can explain all the apparent echoes of the *Frogs* throughout antiquity, even when we have made allowance for the fact that this play figures larger on our horizons than it might have done in antiquity, so too the spread of our evidence does not allow the writing of any linear 'narrative' of ancient criticism and thinking about literature. Some small bits of the most obvious gaping hole in our knowledge – the Hellenistic period – are being filled in by the publication and discussion of new texts of Philodemus, and the recent renewed interest in scholia bodes well for advances in understanding. Nevertheless, the overall picture is desperately patchy and uneven. In most modern 'histories' of these subjects, the figures of Plato and Aristotle rightly loom large: in their very different ways, the engagement of the two philosophers with both poetry and rhetorical prose mark a, rather than *the*, beginning of a discipline which still flourishes today and much of which is still informed by their concerns. Plato and Aristotle will, of course, be very important in this book too, though no single chapter is devoted to them. Whether it be foreshadowings in the *Frogs* of the critical concepts and literary histories which Plato and Aristotle systematised, or the importance of their ethical and political ideas for thinking about comedy, or the omnipresence of Plato in the critical works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 'Longinus' and Plutarch, there is no getting away from these two great figures. Nevertheless, there are other critical currents which preceded them and then persisted after them, often affected by them but also with their own independent momentum, and I hope that this book also gives some of these currents their due. The institutional and disciplinary implications of the term 'criticism' have sometimes served to conceal the variety of ancient ways of thinking about the literary heritage; I hope that the chapter devoted to Euripides' *Cyclops* will illustrate not just how the process of literary *mimēsis* was in antiquity, as it is today, also a 'critical' process, but also how, in the Athens of the later fifth century no less than in Ptolemaic Alexandria or Augustan Rome, reflection upon the literature of the past went hand-in-hand with the creation of the literature of the present. Like scholarship, 'criticism' as a particular activity, whether ἔργον,

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τέχνη or *ars*, does of course have its own history, and I hope that this book will indeed contribute to the writing of that history. Nevertheless, without the disciplinary straitjacket that 'criticism' imposes, histories of 'literary criticism' in antiquity would, for example, devote considerable space to tragedy's pervasive and notorious engagement with its epic ancestor, and not just to notorious one-offs, such as Electra's debunking of Aeschylean recognition tokens in Euripides' *Electra*.

As is well known, from what are to us its very beginnings Greek poetry seems to have contained an important strain of reflection upon its own nature and history (the concern with song in the *Odyssey* is perhaps the most familiar example), and it is very probable that early prose followed suit. Thucydides' famous reflections upon the nature of his own and his predecessors' writing of history may seem to speak with a new explicitness and a new vocabulary, but Herodotus' self-positioning against Homer already reflects an equally powerful, if rather differently directed, self-consciousness. These elements within archaic and classical literature have been very much studied, and they here remain in the background; so too, though I have tried throughout to call attention to the interplay between the practice and criticism of poetry, I am very conscious that this book is not the much-needed study of the mutual interchange between poetic imagery and ideas and the language of ancient criticism.[24] Although some very loose chronological pattern may be divined in the arrangement of the chapters, it will be very clear that even less is this book intended to be another survey of 'ancient literary criticism'. The choice of texts around which individual chapters revolve was in part almost inevitable (*Frogs*, 'Longinus') and, in part, dictated by a wish to bring out some of the dominant directions of the ancient engagement with literature. I have been concerned to show how themes and ideas constantly reappear over time and in different genres (as, for example, Thucydides' 'programmatic' pronouncements share ideas with the dichotomies of the *Frogs* and look forward to important currents of later rhetorical criticism),[25] thus suggesting a more fruitful way of studying critical traditions than the more usual narrative history, and to pay particular attention, as the book's subtitle and the passages from which I began suggest, to antiquity's concern with what literature was *for*, what its 'uses' were. It is a utilitarian view of literature and of 'literary criticism' which predominated in antiquity, and I hope that it will become clear why this made sense in antiquity and why it still should.

[24] For some possible directions for such a study see below pp. 125–7 on Horace and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.
[25] See Hunter 2003c.

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This book takes bits of the story into the second century AD, but not seriously beyond that,[26] though of course the date of scholia is often disputed, and I hope that how much we can learn from, say, Eustathius' commentaries on Homer will repeatedly emerge. The story did not, of course, stop there, but it may be that the extraordinary œuvre of the century-straddling figure of Plutarch offers an endpoint which both does not misrepresent too badly the pattern of ancient criticism as it emerges from the texts which have survived to us and looks forward to the sophisticated work of the centuries to come. Not, of course, that chronological order is the only necessary way in which the story can be told. The dominant currents of later antiquity, above all neo-Platonic and allegorical criticism (of a variety of hues), continued many of the critical directions of the periods treated in this book and, as we shall see, the central importance of Platonic (and quasi-Platonic) ideas is already very strongly marked in the critical and rhetorical texts of the early empire; nevertheless, the intellectual structure and educational purposes of the most important texts in these other traditions demand separate treatment, and in this they have indeed been fortunate in recent years.[27] One conviction, however, which all traditions shared and which indeed helps to explain the metamorphoses through which the reception of literature passed was that classical literature actually mattered; it was worth the continuing struggle to understand and exploit, even as intellectual and cultural contexts shifted. I hope that some sense that classical literature and classical interpretation still matter also emerges from this book; a persistent conviction of this truth, together with the pleasures that that conviction brings, are in fact what gave birth to it.

[26] I assume the standard dating for 'Longinus', see below p. 128 n. 1.

[27] See, e.g., Lamberton 1989, Dawson 1992, Struck 2004. For some continuities between 'Longinus' and later criticism see Heath 1999 (though he would not put it like this) and Hunter forthcoming.

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CHAPTER 1

Aristophanes' Frogs *and the critical tradition*

TRAGIC HISTORY

As the second half of the *Frogs* opens,[1] one of Pluto's slaves explains to Xanthias the system of rewards given in the Underworld to the pre-eminent practitioner of each of the 'important and clever' *technai*. Aeschylus holds the position for tragedy, but that is now under threat:

Οἰ. ὅτε δὴ κατῆλθ' Εὐριπίδης, ἐπεδείκνυτο
τοῖς λωποδύταις καὶ τοῖσι βαλλαντιοτόμοις
καὶ τοῖσι πατραλοίαισι καὶ τοιχωρύχοις,
ὅπερ ἔστ' ἐν Ἅιδου πλῆθος. οἱ δ' ἀκροώμενοι
τῶν ἀντιλογιῶν καὶ λυγισμῶν καὶ στροφῶν
ὑπερεμάνησαν κἀνόμισαν σοφώτατον··
κἄπειτ' ἐπαρθεὶς ἀντελάβετο τοῦ θρόνου,
ἵν' Αἰσχύλος καθῆστο.
Ξα. κοὐκ ἐβάλλετο;
Οἰ. μὰ Δί', ἀλλ' ὁ δῆμος ἀνεβόα κρίσιν ποεῖν
ὁπότερος εἴη τὴν τέχνην σοφώτερος.
Ξα. ὁ τῶν πανούργων;
Οἰ. νὴ Δί', οὐράνιον γ' ὅσον.
Ξα. μετ' Αἰσχύλου δ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἕτεροι σύμμαχοι;
Οἰ. ὀλίγον τὸ χρηστόν ἐστιν, ὥσπερ ἐνθάδε.
(Aristophanes, *Frogs* 771–83)

SLAVE. When Euripides came down, he put on shows for the pickpockets and muggers and cut-throats and burglars – there's a lot of them in Hades. When they heard his antilogies and twistings and turnings, they went crazy and

[1] The sense of a major structural break is given by the strong closural sense of vv. 668–71, in which Dionysus and Xanthias are admitted to Pluto's palace (the geographical, if not emotional, object of their journey), the intervening parabasis, and the prologue-like conversation between the two slaves which follows; see Dover 1993: 6. With vv. 759–60, 'something, something very big is stirring, big indeed, among the dead and there is huge strife', designed to stir the audience's curiosity, compare Lysistrata's complaints about the women not arriving 'for no insignificant matter' (v. 14), but one which is 'big and fat' (vv. 23–4) at the start of her play.

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