II.

DIACHRONIE DANS LA CONSTRUCTION EUROPÉENNE

LES RACINES GRÉCO-LATINES DE L'EUROPE MODERNE

POST MODERN IMAGES IN *EPISTULA AD PISONES*?

Prof. univ. dr. Lucian CHIŞU
Muzeul Naţional al Literaturii Române
lucianchisu@gmail.com

Abstract: Starting from the impressive similarities between the descriptions made by Horatiu in Ars poetica, 1 – 37 (Epistula as Pisones) and postmodernist expressions of contemporary art – especially regarding the negative examples, the author is wondering what could it be the connection between the two eras. Is there any preeminence of the whole in the universe of the human mind? Is it actually an intuitive, visionary skill of the genius creators who see sometimes "over the centuries"?

Keywords: culture, realism, canon, postmodernism

Horatius (Horatius Flaccus Venusianus 65-8 anta Christi), as well as his contemporary Virgilius, is one of the most important poets of Antiquity, his work being considered a spiritual patrimony. Conceived as a mirror of reality (*ut pictura poesis*[1]) Horatius' literature contains high artistic levels. Through his innate charisma, through long thought word and through crafted exercise of meters and general issues of lyrics, the satire, the odes, epodes and the letters are essences of social and artistic universe but also an authentic source of wisdom. Numerous dictionaries and books of cogitations of Roman Antiquity in which the poet is present.

[1] The famous affirmation of Simonide din Keos (sec. VI-V) who said that „painting is a quiet poetry and poetry is a talking painting".

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

Guessing the ever value of art, Horatius was sure of its eternity, along with his own (*Non omnis moriar*), on behalf of which he left for the posterity the reminded thesaurus of morale, aesthetic and artistic knowledge. Through apophthegmatic diffusion, over the centuries, Horatius'work became an illustration and "code" of the age; Resembling the nature, which, in its caprices, sometimes encapsulates fragments of existence in the translucent amber, Horatius' lyrics preserve a long disappeared world.

The present text does not aim to review the virtues of the grand poet. His life, reference point but above all, the significance of his work, have been for about two milenniums a motif of study and research, the opportunity of founding scientific titles, as well as of starting some university departments.

Expressing the general ideas of existence into the artiscally feathered word, Horatius contismes to live, beyond the intrisic value, through the fertile dialogue that the age have, even if, during the two milenniums, the sides of art and culture, as well as the directions of evolution of the humanity have endured spectacular changes. The congruent character of social-historic evolution, the idea of continuity and its systemic nature, permanently confirmed, are sometimes questioned. Our article although starts from underlining several cleavages in the artistic area and offers an interpretation, rather speculative, of „captured" (rather than comprised) data in the second part of the title: *Post Modern Images in Epistula ad Pisones.*

However, what connections can be made between the images Horatius' created in the first 37 lines of *Epistula ad Pisones* (a letter better known under the name of „poetic art", as a text with important normative values), and the postmodernist phenomenon of contemporary art is difficult to answer. But, the resembling, greater or just illusory can start some hypotheses. For this purpose, we show below in Latin and in English[2] parts from Horatius' texts, „doubled" by the examples and commentaries of the art critique Brett Yviet[3], one of the most *en vogue* American art critiques.

Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam	*Human head if on the neck a painter would want to*
iungere si velit et varias inducere plumas,	*nod it and with different feathers to dress some members*
undique collatis membris ut turpiter atrum	*picked up from all the places, as well as the woman*
desinat in piscem mulier formosa supernae:	*who is beautiful at head should end in an ugly black fish*
spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici?	*Will you come and watch, will you keep your laughter friends*
Credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum	*Do you think Pisoni, that this is more than this painting?,*

[2] In order to have the paragraphs in Romanian, we used the translations of Constantin I. Niculescu, from Horaţiu, *Satire şi epistole*, 1959, ESPLA, Bucureşti and Al. Hodoş and Th. Mănescu, from Horatius, *Opera omnia*, II, 1980, Editura Univers, Bucureşti.

[3] The information is from „Respiro" (an art and culture magazine), sept. 2000.

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

persimilem, cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae
fingentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni
reddatur formae.'pictoribus atque poetis

quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas'
Scimus, at hanc veniam petimusque damusque;
Vicissim
sed not ut plaidis coeant inmitia, non ut
serpents avibus geminentur, tigribus agni.
(...)
qui variare cupit rem prodigialiter unam,
delphinium silvis adpingit, fluctibus aprum.
In vitiam ducit culpae fuga, si caret arte

The book in which, like a sick man dreams, there are
Bad imagination which has no hands, nor legs?
Do not belong to a whole. „This was given to the poets and the painters.
To dare for anything, always, equal power".
We know and this agreement we make, as well as we request it
But this should not be joined by mild animals
Nor mixed with flying snakes, and tigers with lambs

They want amazingly to change simple subjects,
They paint a dolphin in a forest, a wild-boar in waves
Running from a bad thing push us harder if the art is missing.

Mona Hatoum, an artist, realises a video collage, starting from her endoscopies.
David Schapiro makes a self portrait of soy that he keeps in the freezer.
Mark Quinn collects his blood in order to scarve his portrait of blood curd.
Damien Hirst presents sections of cows, pigs, horses, formalin sharks, helium balloons over a mattress full of knives. Another work of Damien Hirst cosists of live fish installations in a plastic container arranged as a gynaecologist cabinet.

Inceptis gravibus plerumque et magna professis
purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter
adsuiturpannus, cum lucus et ara Dianae
et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros
aut flumen Rhenum aut pluvius describitur arcus;

sed nunc non erat his locus Et fortasse cupressum.

scis simulare: quid hoc, si fractis enatat exspes
navibus, aere dato qui pingitur? Amphora coepit

institui: currente rota cur urceus exist?

For a great beginning that solid things promises
They usually put couple of slices of sheets of purple
To shine far away, when the forests and Diana's altar
Or the corners which run on merry fields
Are described, and the waves of the Rhine, even the rainbow
Did not belong to this place. The cypress you know how to paint,
Which is the way, when the money paid for the sail
Without hope, is anyone who got away when the ships sank?
Is the amphora working and is the wheel spinning to make the jug?

In the art exhibitions over the Ocean, postmodernism's birthplace, the concept of *stuplim* (a combination of *stupid*, *plain* and *boring*) a term invented to explain the art metamorphosis is infashion. Another term, *popkabalism* defines the style that uses differently coloured letters in order to compose texts in which viewer's attention is focused on the individual letters' design and not on the global meaning. In

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

conceptualism the art object may be replaced by an idea which can be concretely realised by somebody else; today, the context in which an object is placed became more important for the object definition than the object itself.

Horatius' work researchers stress that the first 37 lines of the *Epistle* represent a *tehnē-ars*, an introduction manual in a given field suitable to the data of poetics and rhetoric, referring to the work of art's constituting as a subject (*poesis*), as well as to finding the rhetorical arguments. The affirmation is bound to draw the attention that, contrary to the hypotheses concerning Horatius' postmodernism, hypotheses which will appear to many as hazardous, we will not leave the old references field and, most of all, will not ignore them, putting them to silence. Yet we do make the observation that this is not our investigation area.

An useful question regarding our subject is if the poet conceived for an argumentative purpose the previous images, or if these are taken as examples of imperfections, as the major errors from his time's works. In both cases, the demonstrative feature cannot be placed under doubt, because Horatius showed how not to conceive the literary art, an art in which the close up between poetry and painting represent a norm of connecting to reality or, figuratively said, to truth.

The first image *Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam/ iungere si velit et varias inducere plumas,/ undique collatis membris ut turpiter atrum/ desinat in piscem mulier formosa supernae:/ spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici? Credite, Pisones, isti tabulae fore librum/ persimilem cuius, velutaegris somnia, vanae/ fubgentur species, ut nec pes nec caput uni reddatur formae* has made a bright career abbreviated by the formula *designat în piscem*, assumed as a bad taste label, of unnatural, of a work with great beginning but stranded towards the end. *To end in fishtail* circulates in popular cultures, as an undanted mark of reference power generated by the original cult. If the image isn't found in the Antiquity literary works, the idea of natural unity is still omnipresent[4]. As for the possibility that the *fish woman* embodies, as a fabulous character, sirens, for example, we must show that the announcing was recorded later than in Antiquity[5].

The fragment *scimus, at hanc veniam petimusque damusque vicissim);/ sed not ut plaidis coeant inmitia, non ut/ serpents avibus geminentur, tigribus agni* seems to be

[4] The comparison of the literary work with the natural unity of a human being is found in Platon, *Phadres*, 264 C; the unity and the simplicity of the work as a whole is the main criterion of the creation process and is a standard of beauty born from the imitation of a natural model (Aristotel, *Poetica*, 7-8).

[5] The siren appearance for the public premiered in the nineteenth century from Phineas T. Barnum, a curiosity salesman that had a real fantasy, and who discovered his vocation to give a bigger importance to the way in which the goods must be sold than the production of the goods. At the end of public debates when the book of Ch. Darwin was presented, *Originea speciilor (The origin of the species)*, the American presented to the public the siren Feejee (on a project of 1,50m long, with monkey head and arms with a fishtail). Phineas T. Barnum is considered the father of publicity.

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

referring, in some classic phylologists' opinions to the digression of some Greek and Latin Antiquity's minor poets, whose descriptive passages of poetic virtuosity, following the Alexandrian way, citated the content, harming the unity of the work. Starting from another text[6] of Horatius', the specialists recorded that in the neoteric poet's M. Furius Bibaculus' epic, the author makes a description of the Rhine, description which he considers useless from the artistic rigors of the era, point of view. Finally, the existence of some voting tables, incrusted with images not connected to the meaning, is preserved until today, certain. The recommendation made to the authors, not to deviate from the connotative realism, reveals the idea that when the creation of an anphor is intended, the result cannot be a jug. In consequence the unity of the subject requested that, between causes and effects logical links should be determined.

As D. M. Pididi[7] shows in the chapter dedicated to *Poetic art* of Horatius, „still in the practical order, we should try to ensure by any means the unity of the work. The lines 1 to 37 are dedicated exclusively to this concern. In his time, Aristotles claimed the same thing, when he compared the work of art to a live organism, where every member had its place and alltogether ensured the maintaining of life. Horatius requested an equal coherence, a complete adapting of the parts to the whole, to giving the impression of simplicity seen in the line: *Denique sit quod vis, simplex dumtaxat et unum.*"(p. 165) Sending us to Aristotle leads to the core of Horatius' overtakings from his forerunners, especially to Neoptolemos of Parion's ideas, recognized in the *Poetic art* almost everywhere, but this is not our work's hypothesis. This is mentioned only with the aim of fixing, through Horatius position, the idea of synthesis of the Greek-Roman classicism. In fact, for the era in which he lived and created, Horatius was a modern. His modernity consisted of continuous perfection of his artistic form, in his idealistic originality and his novelty.

Going to the images from the post modern art, we once again stress the distinction: Horatius exemplifies through the images *the prohibition* of using the artistic instrument in that manner, while, in the examples that we will call of a „last minute", all these are *assumed* in the name of another artistic belief. The fact is dovious and makes the object of the interview that Brett Yviet gave to Paul Doru Mugur[8], with many examples (we have also used) regarding the new Babel of establishment of and artistic exposure.

Before we continue, we ought to remind that postmodernism is vehemently disputed by a number of theoreticians. The list is long, among others, naming Charles

---

[6] *Satire*, I, 10, lines 42-45.

[7] *Formarea ideilor literare în antichitate*, 1972, Editura enciclopedică română, Bucureşti, (pp. 153-170).

[8] *Şovăieli, metamorfoze, alternative*, 2000, „Respiro", sept., an interview with the art critic Brett Yviet.

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

Murray[9], in whose vision we are only facing an intellectual fashion which covers a very common feeling of mistrust towards the scientific method. Hostilities towards the idea that discrimination judges are suitable in the art analysis or literature case, and the denial of objectivity are features of this passing phenomenon. Ian Hacking[10] considers that „the days of glory of postmodernism seem to have almost vanished, because postmodernism dies by itself; postmodernism is of a naive arrogance, sensed by a free bellicosity". To Alison Lee's, postmodernism names a crisis of cultural authority, while Brian McHalle thinks that, contrary to the theoretisation avalanche, sofisticated and contradictory, postmodernism[11]. Umberto Eco defines it as „an operation mode, a term *bon a tout fiare*", while Ov. S. Crohmalniceanu delimitates it metaphorically, establishing that this is „the Loch Ness monster, many people declare that they have seen it, and give his fabulous appearance different descriptions". Matei Calinescu[12] also underlines his multiple avatars, existent in the archaeology of the human spirit. Among the most evident features, postmodernism cultivates the mixing of narrative and lyrics in poetry, the vitality of the expression, the pastiche, the parody, the collage, and the language games. The absurd era is at its place in literature and art. The reader may choose the meaning, or he may find it in the work for himself, he may produce and interpret its new meanings. Just like watching a painting.

The important thing is to show the sequences that led here. That's why another step of our work commentary refers to the history of art and the changes in the perception of its values along the social evolution. Resuming Brett Yviett's opinions the result is that the journey was long and knew very well differentiated aesthetic steps, as a passing from light to shadows. In the interviewed's opinion, the first step was the ritual one, „in which the art takes part in the taming of the real". Later, once the idea of divinity was formalised and the myth of human's divine origin was consolidated, the artistic expression changes, the art becomes symbolic, while in the Renaissance, as a consequence of the critical spirit developpment critical spirit and the first scientific experiments apparition, at the game time with the first lessons of human dissection, the artists try harder to accurately represent what they saw, after a live model. This mirror art which is realism, will be dominant until the end of the nineteenth century, when the premiere of the photography, through its cheap and rapid alternative, radically changed the role of the artist from a copier to a reality interpreter. Free of the necessity to reflect real world accurately, through impressionism and expressionism, starting from the twentieth century, the artistic imagination explodes, „all the *isms* and the *avant-gardes*, will regularly put electric

[9] *What It Means to Be a Libertarian: a Personal Interpretation*, 1996, Publisher *Broadway*.

[10] *The Social construct on of What*, 1999, Harvard University Press, Masschusetts and London.

[11] Apud, GEACAR, Ioana, *Contextualizând post-modernismul*, 2002, a literary chronic for Linda Hutceon, *Poetica post-modernismului*, Editura Univers, Bucureşti.

[12] *Cinci feţe ale modernităţii*, 1995, Editura Univers, Bucureşti.

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

shocks to the traditional aesthetics". Finally, at the beginning of the 21st century, the perception towards what is now understood through the art object, art in general, changed completely. The object of art is replaced by the idea. The context in which an object is placed today became more important than the object itself, the disappearance of the „borders" between the art object and reality, through *landing* and *performing*, realising the invasion and redefining of real. At the same time the distinction between spectator and artist disappears: some artists integrate the spectator as a component part of the device. It is also to be noticed that Brett Yviet „discovers" a state of fact, and tries to elucidate it through logical arguments. These only explain the changing of aesthetics, without discussing its status, the normative one, without which any subject could not exist. If we are allowed another close up between the images of Horatius' text and the „state of fact" (postmodernism), on the one hand we should aesthetically discuss *avant la letter*, while on the other hand the findings have no foundation, lacking the permission to speak.. This is the source of a frequent *feeling of mistrust in the post-modernist theories: they tend to be based on* deconstruction and do not replace the reference points by anything else. We can even launch the suspicion that between the capacities of some advised and intelligent people to argument anything, and the artistic phenomenon that we are talking about, it all gets down to managing through discourse a profound crisis of identity in art. In reality, the situation is far more serious. The phenomenon does not refer to art, but to eliminate its old forms in our new globalizing society, whose only value is money, in other words the economic. The culture, which in Antiquity was only for the privileged ones, was an almost impossible to reach ideal. The few priviledged ones were considered flamens of their art. The things seem changed today, when the mass media and the multi media facilitate free information to billion of people. Addressing to a public which is anesthetized to mass media, to the roar and noise into which music turned, to video clips and computers, to electronic games, the artists try to capture the attention by shocking us. Our feelings have no time to form: in the present art the shock, the sensation, the tricks are not only named art, but have replaced art; they gained self-standing value. Brett Yviett calls this phase *trigger art*, and art addressed to an immature public who needs immediate gratifications. It parasites the body of the art, and in the terms of French theoretician Jean Baudrillard[13], postmodernism is the transplant or the metastasis of imitations and simulacra in the art field.

Beyond the exemplifying character of the way the things are in contemporary art, to a simple comparison we were shocked by the images that the poet had chosen two milenniums ago. As we said before, they encapsulate a series of pretexts and they are not all artistic references for his time. Was Horatius „daring" beyond the limits of art

[13] *Simulations and Simulacra*, Selected Writings, 1988, Editions Mark Poster (Stanford), Stanford University Press.

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)

which he serves in the text considered as an artistic program or a profession? If we cannot have certainties, to the speculative hypothesis level the answer can be an affirmative one, among others, because in the same paper the author distinguished between *the reverse* which he created and the poems of a madman: *vesanum tetigisse timent fugiuntque poetam/ qui sapient; agitant pueri incautique sequuntur/ Hic dum sublimes versus ructatur et errat – the good ones run away, they do not want to reach the poet's madness./ Hasty children are chasing him, harassing him/ When he declaims his poems dreamly and hallucinating.* The first ones are commented copiously, the latter he defies. Therefore, the images in the lines one to 37 in the *Epistle* are not under irresponsibility, for which a meaning must be seeked. The logic of invoking and representation of images articulated according to an inexisting pattern over consists of the necessity of criticizing and rejecting term. But, under this aspect, the right to dare brings him closer, on occult ways, to what we could forcibly name the modern sensitivity, which, of course, was unknown to him. The only stabile argument refers to breaking the patterns by the visionaries. We have numerous examples of this sort, even recent ones, which prove that imagination does not know the limits of time, it always explores the future. Mihai Eminescu did the same thing by describing intergalactic flights, if we are to believe the specialists in cosmic field.

Forcing the speculative side of any interpretation, Horatius' images can be considered a trademark, an indicator of creative type visionarism, of imaginative power, as it is not neglectable the fact that Horatius himself said in his *Epistle* that painters and poets were always granted the right to dare (to imagine) anything. (*Pictoribus atque poetis/ quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas*).

In conclusion, only under the auspices of a speculation of this sort we can admit that Horatius lyrics are... postmodernist images.

Traducere de Dana Camelia DIACONU

BDD-A4128 © 2007 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:06:06 UTC)