

Horace's public and political poetry has provoked a wide variety of reactions. It is an area where critics find it especially difficult to exclude the prejudices of their own personalities and their own historical circumstances. Mine no doubt will be amply evident in what follows. There is an excellent summary of the differing reactions of major critics of this century (Syme, Fraenkel, La Penna, Brink) at Brink III 523–5.

This book is designed to be read in sequence, but most chapters are reasonably self-contained and readers may pick and choose if they so wish.

My colleagues Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray have both read a draft of what follows. I am extremely grateful to them for their encouragement, suggestions and criticisms. The mistakes that remain are of course due to my own negligence or stubbornness.

1

Background and Circumstances

Satire 1.6.70ff. contain one of Horace's moving eulogies of his father, from which I quote a few words:

... purus et insons
(ut me collaudem) si et uiuo carus amicis,
causa fuit pater his, qui macro pauper agello
noluit in Flauī ludum me mittere, magni
quo pueri magnis e centurionibus orti . . .
...
sed puerum est ausus Romam portare, docendum
artis quas doceat quiuis eques atque senator
semet prognatos. uestem seruosque sequentis,
in magno ut populo, si qui uidisset, auita
ex re praeberi sumptus mihi crederet illos.

... if (to blow my own trumpet) my life is clean
and above reproach, and my friends are fond of me, then the credit
is due to my father.

He was a poor man with a few
scraggy acres, yet he wouldn't send me to Flavius' school
where the important boys, the sons of important sergeant-majors,
used to go . . .
Instead he courageously took his boy to Rome, to be taught
the accomplishments which any knight or senator would have his own
progeny taught. Anyone who noticed my clothes and the servants
in attendance (a feature of city life) would have assumed
that the money for these items came from the family coffers.

(Rudd's Penguin translation)

The story is familiar. Horace's father, resident of Venusia in Apulia, freed-man (as Horace stresses, 6, 45, 46) and a *coactor* (86), the selling agent at

auctions,¹ decided against putting his son in the local school, and sent him instead to be educated in the grand manner at Rome.² Horace is clearly at pains, in these and other lines, to stress the humbleness of his origins; for one thing it enhances his father's sacrifice on his behalf. Nevertheless we might immediately infer – in spite of *macro pauper agello* – that as a *coactor* Horace's father was not unsuccessful. Education in the distant capital must have cost (more on this below). Nor should Horace's stress on his father's freedman status demand from us too vivid a picture of cloth caps. A freedman might indeed be lowly; on the other hand, long before Horace's time freedmen had achieved wealth, influence, and indeed rank; and the Rome of the late republic and Augustan age sees seven or eight sons of freedmen as senators.³

Later in life, and (as I detect) in a slightly more unbuttoned mood, Horace gives another of his many glimpses into his life story, *Epistle 2.2.41ff.*:

Romae nutrirī mihi contigit, atque doceri
 iratus Graīs quantum nocuisset Achilles.
 adiecere bonae paulo plus artis Athenae
 ...
 dura sed emouere loco me tempora grato,
 cuiusque rudem belli tulit aestus in arma
 Caesaris Augusti non responsura lacertis.

1. See Fraenkel *Horace* 4–5 on the functions of a *coactor argentarius*, referring to classic pages of Mommsen.
2. At *Epist.* 2.1.71 Horace reveals that he was taught by the noted *grammaticus* L. Orbilius Pupillus; see Brink III.1.19.
3. On the wealth of freedmen see n. 13 below. The issue of freedmen's sons as senators starts in the late fourth century, with the policies of Appius Claudius the Censor: see Treggiari *Roman Freedmen During the Late Republic* 55ff., 229ff. For freedmen's sons in the senate in the late republic and Augustan age, see Wiseman *New Men in the Roman Senate* 16. We know of two certain cases of freedmen themselves in the senate in the triumphal period (Wiseman), the scandalous effect of a loose age. An example of a freedman's son acquiring great power, wealth and influence without senatorial status is Vedius Pollio (Treggiari 23, *RE* Vedius no. 8 (Zweite Reihe XV 568–70), Syme *Roman Papers* 518–29, a full and fascinating reconstruction). Vedius Pollio was actively involved on the winning side in 31, proceeding then (it appears) to settle the province of Asia on Octavian's behalf with proconsular power; his later life of luxury of course became a byword. Cf. Ch. 2 p. 19 n. 16. One can speculate on what Horace might have achieved in the world, if he had had the inclination and had been on the winning side in 42 B.C. Helvius Mancina, who dubbed Pompey *adulescentulus carnifex*, is another who provides a story worth following up: *Cic. de Orat.* 2.274, 266, Val. Max. 6.2.8, Treggiari *Roman Freedmen* 232. We should not in this context forget Cicero's claim, albeit tendentious, that there were *etiam libertini optimates* (*Sest.* 97). Finally, it may not be irrelevant to recall that M. Antonius' first marriage (before his marriages to his cousin, to Fulvia, and to Octavia) was to the daughter of a freedman, Q. Fadius (Wiseman *New Men* 57).

unde simul primum me dimisere Philippi,
 decisis humilem pennis inopemque paterni
 et laris et fundi, paupertas impulit audax
 ut uersus facerem. (50)

It was my chance to be raised in Rome; there I was taught how much harm was done to the Greeks by the wrath of Achilles. Athens added a little more in the way of a liberal training... But harsh times tore me away from that pleasant spot, and the surge of events swept the recruit into a force which would prove no match for the strong arm of Caesar Augustus. Discharged by Philippi, there I was humble and with my wings clipped, lacking my family town and country house. Bold poverty impelled me to write verses.

(Rudd, adapted)

Here we learn that, in addition to his education with a well-known *grammaticus* in Rome, Horace received the equivalent of a university education at Athens: again something that will have cost. But then came the civil war. As Horace had already told us in *Satire* 1.6.48,⁵ he served in Brutus' army as a military tribune,⁶ that is to say, as an officer of high rank, a rank which was virtually without exception disallowed to any below the equestrian class.⁷ The battle of Philippi followed and the victory of Octavian

4. See n. 2.
5. Cf. too *Sat.* 1.7.
6. Cf. too Suet. *Hor.* quoted n. 8.
7. *RE* Zweite Reihe VI 2439ff., esp. 2442–46, Stein *Der Römische Ritterstand* 110–11, Nicolet *L'ordre équestre à l'époque républicaine* 97f. Stein assumes Horace received the rank because of laxities due to the turmoil of the times. That Horace could have possessed enough money to achieve the equestrian census none of us should doubt: on freedmen and their wealth see Treggiari in n. 13 below, and note the general thrust of this chapter. Taylor 'Horace's Equestrian Career' argues simply that Horace himself *was an eques*, and I believe she is right. But when did he achieve the rank? Nicolet *L'ordre équestre* 914–15 agrees with and amplifies Taylor's view, but thinks equestrian status will have been bestowed on Horace after and as a result of his military tribunate rather than having preceded it (cf. too 98), though he will of course have possessed the census (note that Nicolet does not believe that the title *eques Romanus* was elastic and extended to anyone who achieved the 400,000 sesterces census; he believes it always remained an honour that had to be bestowed – on those with the census – by a suitable magistrate, or was inherited: Nicolet 68 and preceding, 92ff., 101f., 163ff.). Significant facts (besides the military tribunate) agreed by Taylor and Nicolet: e.g. *Sat.* 2.7.53–4 surely implies Horace himself possessed the knight's *anulus aureus*; Horace sat in the same seats at the theatre as the knight Maecenas (*Sat.* 2.6.48 *ludos spectauerat una*; for the law passed by L. Roscius Otho governing equestrian seating in the theatre, see Ch. 8 n. 14). On the *ius anuli auri* as well as Nicolet 93f., see 139–43. On *tribuni militum* and the functions and status of these high-ranking officers see too Gelzer *The Roman Nobility* 4f., 7, 9f., 12, 26.

(Caesar Augustus in the above quotation). And then, the Epistle tells us, *paupertas* and the need to earn his bread by verse. Horace here omits an intervening and prosaic stage. Before earning his bread by his poetry, he served the winning side as a *scriba quaestorius*, a kind of treasury official. This was a position actually of some importance and profitability, and one which, according to the Suetonian *Vita*, Horace purchased.⁸ Again something that cost: so his *paupertas* was not total. The reason for Horace's access of (comparative) *paupertas* is implied in *Epistle* 2.2.50f. above, in the words *inopemque paternilem laris et fundi*. The most probable interpretation of this is that a town-house and a country property belonging to Horace's father were expropriated in the confiscations conducted to settle veterans; Venusia we know was subjected to such expropriations in 43 B.C. or later.⁹ Then, after his spell as a treasury official (omitted in *Epist.* 2.2.41ff.), Horace became a poet (*ut uersus facerem*).¹⁰ He found favour with Maecenas, Augustus' great equestrian minister,¹⁰ and with Augustus himself: in the words of the *Vita*, *primo Maecenati, mox Augusto insinuatus non mediocrem in amborum amicitia locum tenuit*, 'insinuating himself first with Maecenas, and subsequently with Augustus, he held no mean position in the friendship of both'.¹¹ And he found money, as we shall see.

But to return to Horace's father and to focus on Horace's circumstances up until 42 B.C., a formative period. Horace's father: *macro pauper agello*, in the unassuming words of *Satire* 1.6.71; an auction agent. In fact, that same *Satire* yields the fact that Horace's father not only had money enough to educate Horace at Rome, but he educated him in the manner of a senator or knight's son; indeed the only – invisible – difference between Horace's circumstances and that of the sons of the great was that his funding came from earned, not inherited sources (*Sat.* 1.6.78–80); Horace's father also had money enough to educate his son at Athens. And *Epistle* 2.2.50–52 tells us (a crucial disclosure) that he possessed town and country properties ample enough to have disencumbered Horace, had they not been confiscated, from the need to earn his living. Horace, *libertino patre natus*, in fact comes, economically speaking at least, from a privileged background. Most probably indeed he was or became equestrian.¹² So Horace senior must have

8. *Vita Horati, bello Philippensi excitus a M. Bruto imperatore tribunus militum meruit uictisque partibus uenia impetrata scriptum quaestorium comparuit*. . . . On the functions of a *scriba quaestorius* see Fraenkel *Horace* 14f.; on the importance of *scribae* ('the highest minor officials of the republic'), see Gelzer *Roman Nobility* 14. It is interesting to recall that when Vespasian was a *quaestor*, he married the daughter of a *scriba quaestorius*, Suet. *Vesp.* 3.

9. See Fraenkel *Horace* 13 with n. 6.

10. On Maecenas, and on the significance of the phrase 'great equestrian minister', see Ch. 7, esp. the appendix on Maecenas.

11. On the significance of *amicitia*, 'friendship', in these circumstances, and on this passage of the *Vita* as a whole, there is further discussion in Ch. 2.

12. See n. 7 above.

been a pretty successful *coactor argentarius*, or not just a *coactor argentarius*, one of the success-story freedmen, of whom by now there was a very large number;¹³ and the impression conveyed by parts of *Satire* 1.6 is disingenuously humble. So, considering the changing attitudes to freedmen, considering the money and advantages which his father could bestow upon him, considering the fact that he was possibly equestrian even before 42 B.C.¹⁴ – and considering the revolutionary times – it was no great surprise that Horace should find himself a military tribune. But that Horace, military tribune, well educated, probably equestrian, and heir to substantial property, should suddenly find himself with the need to earn money, must have been a surprise and a shock, especially to Horace.¹⁵ Nor could the route to money have been, anyway in the first instance, congenial. It was via those against whom he had just fought: the Caesarian victors. The way the *Vita* phrases his actions makes them sound not just uncongenial but humiliating: *uictisque partibus uenia impetrata scriptum quaestorium comparuit, ac primo Maecenati, mox Augusto insinuatus* . . . , 'when his side had been conquered, and he had sought and won pardon, he purchased the position of *scriptor quaestorius*, and first insinuating himself with Maecenas,

13. See n. 3 above. On the economic success of freedmen cf. Treggiari *Roman Freedmen* 108: 'As early as the second century B.C., a large number of freedmen had landed property, since it was worth while to pass a law allowing those with estates valued at 30,000 sesterces or over to belong to the country tribes. . . . wealthier freedmen, like any other Roman of any pretensions, liked to have a country estate.' It is to this sort of class or higher that Horace's father must have belonged. But as to Horace's father himself, Treggiari has, I think, been taken in. She remarks (loc. cit.) 'Horace's home near Venusia is referred to as barely supporting his father and himself. . . , referring to *macro pauper agello*; cf. too 101. But Treggiari's book admirably documents wealthy freedmen, and the means whereby they acquired their wealth; cf. Ch. III on careers.'

Wiseman *New Men* 72 cites the account-books of the Pompeian *coactor* Caecilius Iucundus to show that this job could lead to wide financial interests; he concludes that Horace's father 'was not necessarily a poor man', a great understatement I think. (When we consider the financial possibilities open to a *coactor*, we might also remember that even an auctioneer could earn large sums of money. Gelzer *Roman Nobility* 16 cites, 'L. Aelius Stilo, son of an auctioneer and surnamed Praeconinus on account of his father's calling, <who> is expressly designated as an *equus* by Cicero, not surprisingly since auctioneering was a profitable business.') Syme's comments on Horace's circumstances in *History in Ovid* 181 are slightly enigmatic. On the reasons why Horace should strike a disingenuously humble chord, see Ch. 2.

14. As mentioned above n. 7, Taylor 'Horace's Equestrian Career' argues, plausibly, that Horace was officially of equestrian status, and Nicolet *L'ordre équestre* agrees, though he thinks the honour was bestowed after and as a result of the military tribunate. Much in Horace's *Satires* is clarified and made more pointed, e.g. the emphasized denial of a political role, if Horace was of equestrian rank.

15. Underplayed by White *Promised Verse* 12–13.

subsequently with Augustus . . . etc. (see above). And one can imagine that the process was not without its mortifying moments.¹⁶

To continue the story. By the early thirties B.C. Horace is in the circle of poets patronized by Maecenas,¹⁷ at some time before 31 B.C.¹⁸ he is in possession of the 'Sabine farm'. The phrase I have quoted, 'Sabine farm', stems from Horace. His grateful description in *Satire* 2.6.1ff., carefully pitched, has inspired such modest but misleading¹⁹ nomenclature:

hoc erat in uotis: modus agri non ita magnus,
hortus ubi et tecti uicinus iugis aquae fons
et paulum siluae super his foret. auctius atque
di melius fecere. bene est. nil amplius oro,
Maia nate . . .

This is what I prayed for. A piece of land – not so very big, with a garden and, near the house, a spring that never fails, and a bit of wood to round it off. All this and more the gods have granted. So be it. I ask for nothing else, O son of Maia . . .

(Rudd)

I shall discuss the delicacy of this description, and its reasons, in the next chapter. For now, let us simply get at the facts. Again it is a later *Epistle* which adds and more candidly clarifies, *Epistle* 1.14.1ff.: *uulice, siluarum et mihi me reddentis agelli, quæm tu fastidis habitatum quinque focus et/quinque bonos solitum Variam dimittere patres* . . ., 'Bailliff of the woods and piece of land that makes me whole again – which you despise though it is inhabited by five households and regularly sends five trusty fathers to *Varia*'. Horace's 'farm': an *agellus*²⁰ (with woods). But, actually, as Horace is provoked to say, an estate large enough to accommodate five separate tenant farmers,²¹ men who are perhaps sufficiently substantial in their own

16. Fraenkel *Horace* 15f.: 'when Suetonius in this context says *insinuatus*, he puts on the facts his own interpretation, the interpretation of a man living at the court of Hadrian'. I see no real evidence for this. See further below in Ch. 2.
17. *Sat.* 1.5 for example is datable to 37 B.C. *Sat.* 2.6, datable to c. 31 B.C. (see below), talks of it being 'now seven, in fact almost eight, years since Maecenas came to regard me as one of his friends'. (On the significance of 'friends' in this context see Ch. 2.) See further Du Quesnay 'Horace and Maecenas'.
18. *Sat.* 2.6 celebrates the 'Farm', and 2.6.53 refers to the Dacians, involved in the issue of Actium (31 B.C.).
19. But still used e.g. by Gold *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* 118, 124, etc.; White *Promised Verse* 16; Rudd *Satires of Horace* 243–7 is likewise misled; not so at *Themes* 55.
20. Horace's free use of *agellus* here may remind us of, and stimulate thoughts about, *macro pauper agello*.
21. See Kiessling – Heinze, Wickham, following Orelli, ad loc.: *habitatam* is I think best taken as a quasi-present participle. Porphyrio and pseudo-Acro think *habitatam* refers to the use to which Horace's estate was put *before* it came into Horace's hands, i.e. that it *used* to comprise five separate farms.

right to perform local governmental functions.²² The eight slaves implied in *Satire* 2.7.118 are therefore solely to tend to the master²³ or a 'home farm',²⁴ not to work to produce income; the tenants would do that. This may not (yet) be wealth on anything like the scale of, say, a Cicero; and the district may be the less fashionable Sabine rather than Tiburtine zone of gentlemanly retreat;²⁵ but we are talking of comfort, and a source of revenue. Besides this Horace acquired a town house, a *domus*, in Rome (*Sat.* 1.6.114ff.); he stresses the simplicity of his mode of life in town, but one should not be so moved by Horace's picture as to imagine his living in an 'apartment': a *domus* is a *house*, particularly a town house;²⁶ nor should one forget that the mere three slaves who are mentioned are a small number, but they do indicate a permanent, staffed, and ever-ready residence. And, looking ahead, we may infer other acquisitions, ones that Horace does not so freely publicize as the 'Sabine farm'. In all Horace received from his patrons (Augustus as well as Maecenas)²⁷ at least three and possibly five properties (see appendix). In short, Horace, like Vergil, was rewarded more like a star than, say, a scholar; this is a fact that gets obscured – and Horace himself has done something to assist the obfuscation.

To sum up. Horace comes from a background that in material terms at least was comfortable. He could and would have expected to be a man of leisure; he was probably equestrian at least by 42 B.C. He is reduced by unforeseeable events to comparative poverty. He is then restored by patronage, in the first place by the patronage of Maecenas, to material comfort. This whole story he handles with some discretion. Certain details are not revealed until the later *Epistles*. In the *Satires* and indeed throughout he downplays the

22. Whether *bonos* . . . *patres* means that these tenant farmers go (went) with their produce to *Varia* (modern Vicovaro, the local town) to market simply as *patres familias* (cf. Kiessling – Heinze, Rudd in his Penguin translation), or whether it implies that they go there to perform some function in local government (*patres* = slightly ironically, say, *decuriones*), is difficult to say. I incline to the latter since it gives point to Horace's choice of the word *patres*.

23. This sounds pretty comfortable to us, but it was of course modest by rich Roman standards: cf. J. Griffin *Latin Poets and Roman Life* 14ff. on the staff in families related to the imperial house.

24. Cf. *Epist.* 1.14.39.

25. If the site commonly assumed to be Horace's Sabine villa near modern Licenza is the genuine one, it is border country: Licenza is 22.5 kilometres north-east (by the modern road) from Tivoli. The wording of the *Vita (uxit plurimum in secessu ruris sui Sabini aut Tiburtini)* may be referring to an ambiguity in the estate's geography, the sort of ambiguity that the fashion-conscious Catullus had exploited (poem 44); alternatively, it may be referring to a second estate in the Tiburtine district distinct from the Sabine, and acquired by Horace later: see appendix below.

26. See appendix. See Reckford 'Horace and Maecenas' 200 for Horace's 'modest city apartment'.

27. Cf. Ch. 10 p. 191 with n. 26.

affluence of his patronized condition; and, somewhat surprisingly, he likes to picture his libertine origins in colours of exaggerated humility. I make these points about Horace's biography to enable me to suggest difficulties that Horace as man and poet must have experienced in the thirties B.C. and later, and to show how he solved them. Aspects and emphases of his poetical work will in this way be explained.

Appendix

Horace's Property, the Complete Story; Vergil's Property and Wealth

The Suetonian *Vita Horatii* reports: *uixit plurimum in secessu raris sui Sabini aut Tiburtini, domusque ostenditur circa Tiburni luculum*, 'He lived for the most part either in his Sabine or his Tiburtine country retreat [but see below], and a house of his is shown near the grove of Tiburnus'. When *rus* and *domus* are thus conjoined, the former refers to a country estate, the latter to a town house: cf. *OLD* s.v. *rus* 2, e.g. Cicero *Ad Atticum* 4.18 (= SB 92). 2 *domus me et rura nostra delectant*.¹ What was shown to tourists in Suetonius' time was therefore a town house belonging to Horace at fashionable Tibur;² and the *secessus raris Sabini* was the 'Sabine farm', i.e. the estate comprising five separate tenant farms (see above). So Horace came to acquire at least two properties besides the *domus* in Rome (above p. 7).³

The most natural interpretation of *secessu raris sui Sabini aut Tiburtini* might be that Horace possessed *both* a Sabine *and* a (fashionable) Tiburtine country estate: 'he lived for the most part either in his Sabine or his Tiburtine country retreat'. Since patronage rewarded Vergil with two country *secessus* (see below), it may seem both fair and probable that similar munificence attended Horace. Alternatively, one property may be being referred to, situated in an ambiguous border area: thus, 'he lived for the most part in his country retreat, be it Sabine or Tiburtine'. In this case, the *Vita* would be acknowledging the same sort of ambiguity of locale that the fashion-conscious Catullus exploits (poem 44): *o funde noster seu Sabine seu Tiburs; nam te esse Tiburtem autumant, quibus non est/ cordi Catullum laedere* . . . etc.

At all events, the *Vita* knows of at least two Horatian properties outside Rome, at least one in the fashionable Tiburtine district. We note that it is

1. Shackleton Bailey translates: 'My house in town and my places in the country are a source of delight.'
2. Thus Nisbet - Hubbard I.101.
3. On this *domus* see too Shackleton Bailey *Profile of Horace* 57.

HORACE

Behind the Public Poetry

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