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The restless companion: Horace, *Satires* 1 and 2

Horace's two books of *Satires* have always lurked in the shadow of the *Odes*.¹ Aside from such favourite anecdotes as the much-translated encounter with a literary gatecrasher on the Via Sacra, or the "granny's tale" of the town mouse and the country mouse,² they have for the most part been found strange, profoundly unsatisfying poems, whose self-deprecating tone has condemned them to neglect. They are also, by most standards, astonishingly unsatirical. The first book, published in 36/5 BCE, is Horace's poetic debut, an "integrational"³ book in which a freedman's son marks his miraculous arrival in society (after being proscribed and fighting on the wrong side at Philippi), and justifies his envied niche as a civil servant (*scriba quaestorius*) and poet in the "pure house" of the millionaire Maecenas.⁴ The second, published in 30 BCE after the battle of Actium, is tense with all the increasing restrictions of the new regime; Horace virtually gives up the right to speak, and directs his satire mostly against himself.

Some of the most important changes in civil liberties in the history of Rome are spanned, then, by the two books. By positioning himself as a satirist in the footsteps of his aristocratic Republican predecessor Lucilius (d. 102 BCE), Horace was drawing attention to the difficulty of writing full-blooded satire in a changed political climate. He was also demonstrating how even the most casual and messy of genres could aspire to new standards of composition. By promoting technical improvements such as restraint, flexibility, and inoffensiveness, Horace made a literary virtue out of a political necessity.⁵ In recent criticism the *Sermones* have been steadily rehabilitated: not just as a socio-political document of one citizen's cautious progress through the mean

¹ The *Satires* traditionally follow the *Odes* and the *Epodes* in many editions of Horace's works.

² *Sermones* 1.9; 2.6.79–117. ³ Kennedy (1992) 33.

⁴ Pure house: 1.9.49; Horace's life: Suetonius, *Vita Horati*; Fraenkel (1957) 1–23; Horace's post of *scriba quaestorius*: Suetonius, *Vita Horati*; Armstrong (1986); Horace and Maecenas: Reckford (1959), Lefèvre (1981), DuQuesnay (1984) 24–7, Evenepoel (1990).

⁵ Freudenburg (1993) 86–92.

streets of Rome and a meditation on freedom, both personal and generic, but also as a deceptively sophisticated and allusive literary artefact.⁶

Horace alternates between calling his satires *Satirae* and *Sermones*, "Conversations," a title which suggests that they were simulating companionable speech, with its aimless starts, slack inner logic, and throw-away endings, the kind friends tolerate and enemies overlook.⁷ They are addressed primarily to his patron Maecenas, which makes everyone else into jealous eavesdroppers, but Horace is also by implication conversing with the small poetic coterie, including Virgil and Varius, to which he belonged (and which he puts on display in a triumphant rollcall at the end of book 1), as well as being in constant intertextual dialogue with the wider community of poets, dead and alive.⁸

Book 1 experiments with different kinds of *sermo*: diatribe (primarily a Hellenistic form associated with neo-Socratic or Cynic ranting on moral themes),⁹ gossip, literary chitchat. *Sermones* 1.1–3 are moralizing sermons, the basic rules for life Horace claims to have learned at his father's knee – how to be undemanding and play safe in the areas of material consumption, sex, and social relations; 1.4 and 1.10 are defenses of Horatian satire; 1.5 is an account of an uncomfortable journey from Rome to Brundisium in the train of a peace-making expedition; 1.7–9 are anecdotes (7 is about a *cause célèbre* in Brutus' camp in Asia, 8 is a comic aetiology spoken by a statue of Priapus, in 9 Horace meets his nemesis, a literary poseur trying to penetrate Maecenas' circle); 1.6 is a conversation with Maecenas, a confident approach to a great man from a nobody who has chosen a quiet life away from politics.

It is a big joke, of course, that a man whose profession was that of a civil servant or private secretary (*scriba*) should set himself up as a conversationalist, and there is play throughout on the notions of writing and speaking,¹⁰ as well as the idea of having anything to say at all. Lucilius had bared his soul

⁶ E.g. DuQuesnay (1984), Henderson (1999) 202–5, Oliensis (1998a) 17–63; Freudenburg (1993) *passim*; (1996); (2001) 1–124.

⁷ Cicero, *De officiis* 37 on the theory of *sermo*; on the alternative titles see Van Rooy (1965) 50–89.

⁸ E.g. Horace and Lucretius: Merrill (1905), Murley (1939), Freudenburg (1993) 19–20; Horace and Virgil: Van Rooy (1973), Zetzel (1980) 66–7, Putnam (1995); Horace and Callimachus: Wehrli (1944), Wimmel (1960) 148–67, Benedetto (1966), Cody (1976), Scodel (1987), Freudenburg (1993) 104–7; Horace and Lucilius: Fiske (1920); Horace and Philetas: Gigante (1993).

⁹ Oltramare (1926), Wimmel (1962).

¹⁰ *Charta* ("paper"): S. 1.4.36, 101, 139; 1.5.104; *subscribe libello* ("add this on to the bottom of my book"): 1.10.92.

to his books “like faithful friends,” but his “open tablet” becomes Horace’s closed book.¹¹ Dangerous personal and political gossip is largely censored, even though the satires leak with a constant stream of real and type names.¹² The speaker of the *Sermones* represents himself as naturally reticent, while the real bogeys are people who talk too much: windy Stoics, divas who do not know when to stop, vicious dinner guests, garrulous satirists like Lucilius, pushy and pretentious literati, squabbling litigants, and loud-mouthed salesmen.¹³ *Sermones* 1.6 contains a tiny sketch of Horace’s first interview with Maecenas, a “non-conversation” between a stammering youth and a laconic aristocrat, which works as an ironic background for the book as a whole.

The state of “talking to Maecenas” is Horace’s *fait accompli*, the place where he has ended up, but are these “conversations” really any more than a kind of smokescreen, with their banal philosophizing, damp-squib jokes, holiday slides, and shaggy-dog stories? Horace appears to be trying to white-wash his reputation and refute the charge of social climbing by having nothing whatsoever to say for himself. If we do learn anything significant from the poems, it is only in the most indirect way. Larger hostilities are recorded through the minor frictions of personal relations or duels between nonentities (a legal battle in Brutus’ camp in Asia Minor in 1.7; a slanging match between two clowns in 1.5). The central portrait of *amicitia* between two former enemies, Horace and Maecenas, stands in for the entire peace process; the discord between Octavian and Antony is dismissed as a tiff between friends; Horace’s own involvement on Brutus’ side in the civil war is reduced to a pardonable gaffe like entering a room in the wrong way.¹⁴

One can, of course, read between the lines and understand Horace’s apparently casual but discreet dialogues with Maecenas as a blueprint for how to behave as a new arrival in post-Republican Rome, where freedom of speech and movement are permitted within fixed guidelines, both external and self-imposed.¹⁵ The first three so-called “diatribe” poems are really an account of the moral survival course which has kept Horace afloat, with a consistent emphasis on lying low and demanding little, an ethics of self-preservation and contentment.¹⁶ Impersonal sex with anonymous women is deemed

¹¹ S. 2.1.30–34; Harrison (1987). ¹² Rudd (1966) 132–59 on Horace’s names.

¹³ S. 1.1.13–14, 120; 1.3.1–8; 1.4.86–91; 1.4.12; 1.4.14–16; 1.9.12–13, 33–4; 1.10.90–1; 1.7.7, 26–9; 1.6.42–4.

¹⁴ E.g. S. 1.5.29; 1.3.140. See Hunter (1985) 486–90, and Kennedy (1992) 31–4 on the “domestication” of political terms like *amicitia* and *libertas* in *Sermones* 1.

¹⁵ Freudenburg (1993) 86–92 on Horace’s reining in of *libertas* against the background of the civil war; Hunter (1985) on its reinvention as constructive frankness between friends.

¹⁶ Links between the diatribe satires: Armstrong (1964).

preferable to fighting one’s way through barricades of bodyguards and hair-dressers to test the hidden charms of famous men’s wives, and risking one’s reputation and bodily parts in the process.¹⁷ Social relations should be a matter of give and take, where one errs on the side of indulgence, like fathers who give their bandy-legged and birdy sons fond pet names.¹⁸

The first satire sets the tone for the collection as a whole, opening with a quizzical enquiry addressed to Maecenas (“Why is it that no one is content with his lot but always envies other people?”) and ending with a simile about a satisfied dinner guest (suggesting Horace’s own contentment with his small sufficiency). Throughout, images of greedy capacity – granaries, stomachs, money chests, measuring jugs – make the poem not just a sermon against avarice, but a thinly veiled program for Horatian satire, where moderate consumption of material things goes hand in hand with moderate consumption of words.¹⁹ Horace ends with the promise: “That’s enough [*iam satis est*]; I shan’t add another word.” This is nothing less than a radical reshaping of a traditionally open-ended genre into a slimmed-down, modest form, sweetening the pill of moral correction with humor instead of souring it with malice and envy.

There are many ways in which this opening poem is surprising. First, it avoids reference to contemporary Rome in favor of a timeless, generalized discussion of human nature, which draws on different strands of Hellenistic tradition: the moderation of Epicurean philosophy, the streamlined literary aesthetics of Callimachus, the ingredients of Cynic diatribe – animal fables, thumbnail vignettes, anonymous objections²⁰ – and the negative example of heavy-handed Stoics. Secondly, it conspicuously avoids personal abuse²¹ and puts the blame for resentment and ill will squarely on other people, not the satirist himself (actually this so-called “disclaimer of malice” was a characteristic maneuver of satire right from its origins).²² Even so, the name “Maecenas” immediately gives the poem a historical context. The book’s publication coincided with tense negotiations in the war with Sextus Pompeius and a fragile entente between Octavian and Antony. Horace represents himself and Maecenas as the stable exceptions looking down on an anthill of scurrying, disaffected human beings from the high ground of a post-revolutionary status quo. These outlines of a philosophy can be read as a “back to basics” campaign, while Horace’s blend of Callimachean and Epicurean economics contrasts pointedly with the accusations of moral excess hurled between both sides in the recent civil war.²³

¹⁷ S. 1.2.44–6, 97–100, 133. ¹⁸ S. 1.3.43–8. ¹⁹ Hubbard (1981).

²⁰ Oltramare (1926). ²¹ LaFleur (1981). ²² Dickie (1981), Bramble (1974) 190–204.

²³ For the political background to *Sermones* 1: Du Quesnay (1984).

To have a satirist as a friend is a risky business, and *Sermones* 1 really concerns the impossibility, recast as *undesirability*, of writing vitriolic satire in the new conciliatory climate. As Lucilius' low-born successor tries to become a companion to his former enemy, and to negotiate awkward collisions in the streets of Rome, some of the old associations and freedoms of satire must be shed in the process. Instead of the archetypal figure prowling around the forum with venomous fangs and squinting eyes, or "smearing filth onto paper," the new satirist is, most unsatirically, diplomatic and accommodating.²⁴ Horace characterizes his satirical activity alternately as meaningless doodles, metrical prose, pious self-improvement, a child's moral ABC learned at the knee of a stern father, or, as in the picture of the frenzied toilette of pruning and scratching that precedes his casual literary appearances, a kind of perfectionist self-laceration (the only live victims of contemporary satire are the quicks of the writer's own fingernails).²⁵

The flavor of satire has changed too. The acerbic salt and vinegar of Republican invective commemorated in 1.7 is now toned down to suit the sweet-tempered rhetoric of the new civility. When Horace speaks as a statue of Priapus guarding Maecenas' revamped pleasure gardens in 1.8, he plays gamekeeper rather than poacher to the new regime, and frightens away trespassing witches with a comic fart rather than sexual aggression.²⁶ When he is pursued down the Via Sacra by an ambitious poet (1.9), he keeps his dislike within the bounds of politeness, and eventually allows the law to extricate him rather than indulging in open abuse. A cynic's history of civilization in *Sermones* 1.3 (99-117) doubles as a history of the civilizing of satire: tooth-and-nail fights between grunting, promiscuous cavemen give way to the civic branding of thieves and adulterers, followed by deference before the law, and finally mellow philosophical discrimination and forgiveness.

But Horace's *Sermones* are not just a sunny promenade over the burial grounds of the civil war.²⁷ First, this social upstart and freedman's son is still uncertain of the liberties he can take in a city "where sharp-toothed resentment thrives," where a *libellus* is not just a choice little book of poems but a prosecutable lampoon or a court writ, where Caesar is the ultimate authority (*Sermones* 1.3.4), and where the satirical urge to brand or label, to point one's finger (*notare*), can backfire on the aggressor.²⁸ Secondly, the framework of

the satires is never completely amicable. The threeway relationship between a potentially offensive speaker (Horace the satirist), a potentially hypercritical listener (his fastidious patron Maecenas), and a potentially offended eavesdropper (the general reader) is always a triangle of possible paranoia and irritability.²⁹ Every poem in the book could be summed up as an exercise in warding off *invidia*, malicious resentment, and disowning the satirical impulse: the sermons against material envy (1), sexual ambition (2), and vindictiveness (3), and the disavowals of literary outspokenness (4 and 10), hobnobbing with the great (5), political ambition (6), venomous invective (7), sexual aggression (8), pushiness and self-promotion (9).³⁰ Many poems wriggle out of a proper ending with a humorous riposte, a pun, a fart; Horace's ideal satirist, personified by his mocking friend Aristius Fuscus in *Sermones* 1.9, is an escape artist. Easygoing on the surface, Horatian satire has been more appropriately named "a restless genre."³¹

Horace later refers to his satires as poems which "creep along the ground," inspired by a "pedestrian muse."³² Yet they are more ambitious than they seem, and less casual. He boasts openly that his unpretentious life allows him to travel unencumbered and at his own whim, and to sleep with women whose names he can make up himself, but the one exception to these relaxed rules is the perfectionism which ties him to new standards of literary composition.³³ Lucilius' sloppy, spontaneous-seeming "improvisations," which exemplified aristocratic Republican freedom, are rejected in favor of a calculated refinement.³⁴ The new satire, like the new civility, is sensitive and flexible in its approach to a touchy audience:

You need brevity, to let the thought run freely on without becoming entangled in a mass of words that will overload the ears. You also need a way with words which is sometimes solemn, sometimes humorous, sometimes playing the role of an orator or poet, sometimes that of a witty talker who keeps his strength in reserve and carefully plays things down.³⁵

²⁴ *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.62; Horace, *S.* 1.4.36.

²⁵ Doodles: *S.* 1. 4.138-40; 9.2; metrical prose: 4.48; self-improvement: 4.134-7; moral ABC: 1.25-6; 4.105-26; self-laceration: 10.69-71 (71 *uiuos* . . . *unguis*).

²⁶ Anderson (1982) 74-83 on this poem as a poetic statement.

²⁷ *S.* 1.8 is set in Maecenas' public park built over the former Esquiline cemetery.

²⁸ *S.* 1.3.60-1; *libellus*: *S.* 1.4.66; cf. *S.* 1.4.71; 1.10.92; *notare*: *S.* 1.4.5, 106.

²⁹ Muecke (1990), Gold (1992) 162-75 on the ambiguous range of "the audience"; Seock (1991), Lyne (1995) 142 on Horace's moralizing as touchy for Maecenas; Richlin (1992) 184 for the *Satires* as "irritating."

³⁰ Hubbard (1981) 319 on *invidia* as the subject of *S.* 1.1. ³¹ Labate (1981).

³² *Epistles* 2.1.250-1, *sermones* . . . *irepentis per humum*; *S.* 2.6.17, *musa* . . . *pedestri*. See Freudenburg (1993) 183-4, 206-7 on walking and mule-riding metaphors; Freudenburg (1993) 201-3, Gowers (1993b) on *S.* 1.5, the journey to Brundisium, as a realization of these metaphors.

³³ Traveling light: *S.* 1.6.104-6; anonymous sex: *S.* 1.2.126.

³⁴ Rudd (1966) 86-131, Freudenburg (1993) 100-3 on Horace's refinement of Lucilian satire.

³⁵ *S.* 1.10.9-14.

As if working a passage through the city at Maecenas' side, Horace adapts *sermo* to protect his patron from mud, noise, and crowds, and faces up to the onslaughts of anonymous objectors in his path.³⁶ What look like clumsy signposts ("Where is all this leading?" "To cut a long story short," "That's enough of that") are a kind of X-ray of his conversational maneuvers, always geared to self-improvement and to sparing the reader delay or boredom.³⁷

The literary principles laid out in 4 and 10 – brevity, variety, amenability, inoffensiveness – are put into practice in poems which draw attention to narrowly avoided pitfalls of composition, and clean the mud off Lucilius' energetic but sloppy models. Horace's journey south to Brundisium (1.5, based on a similar journey poem by Lucilius) is hampered by real mud, noise, and crowds, but he whisks his readers through at top speed.³⁸ His collision with the pest in 1.9 is full of discomfort and meandering, but he makes it fast moving with zigzagging choreography and snappy dialogue.³⁹ The three "diatribes" (*Sermones* 1.1–3) verge on triteness, long-windedness, and illogicality, as they swerve from one topic to another on the twist of one word: in 3 *aequus* (the central paradox is that it is not "consistent" or "fair" to regard all sins as "equal"); in 2 *medius* (it is "moderate" to enjoy the "middle" regions of the "middle" class of woman who is "easily available" – *in medio*).⁴⁰ At the start of 1.1, Horace cuts short a reasonably small catalogue of discontented human beings with a preemptive "et cetera, et cetera – I don't want to wear out even loquacious Fabius" (13–14) – as though he is only just avoiding the irritating insistence of the sermonizing genre.⁴¹ He ends by shunning the example of philosophers like Crispinus, who pillage the stockpile of Hellenistic philosophy endlessly.⁴²

As a personality behind his "conversations," Horace presents himself as similarly well intentioned and self-improving. One prominent element of the *Sermones* is autobiographical. That is not to say that we should take Horace's account of his humble origins and reluctant emergence completely literally.⁴³

³⁶ Compare the instructions to the solicitous client at S. 2.5.16–17, 88–98 to shelter his patron in the street and tailor his speech to the mood required.

³⁷ S. 1.2.23; 1.1.14; 1.1.95; 1.1.120.

³⁸ Freudenburg (1993) 201–3; Gowers (1993b) 57–8. ³⁹ Rudd (1966) 76–85.

⁴⁰ Lejay (1911) 1, 60 on the "logic of conversation"; Coffey (1976) 70.

⁴¹ *Delassare*, "to wear out" (14), looks like a translation of Greek *diatribein*, "to wear out, pass time," from which "diatribe" comes, though Jocelyn (1982) is skeptical whether there was ever a classical concept of this form.

⁴² S. 1.1.120–1.

⁴³ Armstrong (1986); Williams (1995) for an ingenious theory that Horace's father was only temporarily enslaved; Schlegel (2000) on the father scenes as evoking a generic ancestry for Horatian satire.

Recent criticism has identified the portrait Horace gives us of himself as a composite of comic types – the cowed son, the parasite, the slipshod, bumbling Cynic philosopher – proper for the decorum of satire, whose origins Horace traces from Old Comedy and father figures like Lucilius.⁴⁴ This is a personality attuned to the character of the genre – low key, quotidian, and, on the surface at least, deferential to authority. An unthreatening pose is not simply a literary device, however, but part of Horace’s calculated public “face,” designed to disarm, to elude precise pinning down, and to exemplify the modest front of the new regime.⁴⁵ His seemingly casual revelations in the manner of Lucilius are in fact the controlled self-presentation of a self-made man.

Horace rehearses many different roles in relation to Maecenas and society at large. The ranting figure who plucks personalities from the crowd (*Sermones* 1.4.25) in the first four satires resembles some Cynic street philosopher: Horace, the blunt and abrasive “cat who may look at a king,” is playing Bion to Maecenas’ King Antigonus, Aesop to his Xanthus, Diogenes to his Alexander.⁴⁶ This is the rough, man-of-the-world voice of the speaking penis (*Sermones* 1.2.68–71), Cato egging on a young man outside a brothel (1.2.31–5), or the earthy Priapus statue (1.8).⁴⁷ However, there are more private scenarios for *sermo* too: the closet in 1.3, for example, where a gauche Horace bursts in on Maecenas’ silence or quiet reading “to annoy him with some conversation or other.”⁴⁸ More withdrawn still are the moments in 1.4, where Horace rehearses encounters and moral dilemmas in private, and in 1.9, where he is absorbed in solitary reverie. The image of Horace talking to himself on a sofa or in a portico “with pursed lips” (4.138) suggests that satire has finally abandoned the public stage where it began in democratic Athens for the enclosed spaces of agoraphobic Rome.⁴⁹

Horace presents himself as an imperfect moralist, a Socratic ironist all too aware of his own minor faults.⁵⁰ While he claims to steer the middle path through the extremes of social behavior, there are intermittent caricatures of his rusticity, his naked ambition, or his bad conversational manners which put him back among the crowds of eccentric characters from which he has emerged: exhibitionists, prima donnas, interlopers, small-town civil servants, philanderers, *enfants terribles*.⁵¹ While he claims to lead a

⁴⁴ Reckford (1969) 35; Zetzel (1980) 62; Freudenburg (1993) 3–51, 198–235; Turpin (1998).

⁴⁵ Oliensis (1998a) 1–16.

⁴⁶ *Epist.* 2.2.60: “conversations in the style of Bion”; Kindstrand (1976) 21–87 on Bion’s legacy.

⁴⁷ Henderson (1999) 184–91 on S. 1.2 and 1.8 as “man’s talk.” ⁴⁸ S. 3.65.

⁴⁹ Oliensis (1998) 26: “an oxymoronic portrait of satiric silence.”

⁵⁰ Anderson (1982) 13–49.

⁵¹ Henderson (1999) 214–15 notes the similarity between the pest’s calculations at S. 1.9.56–60 and Horace’s own at S. 1.4.134–7.

“pure life” himself, images of the filth he has left behind – stinking brothels, dirty bath-oil, chamber-pots, flute-girls, quacks, and buffoons – give the satires an essential token staining. The satirical body with which Horace fleshes out his “disembodied voice”⁵² centers on the nether regions, the stomach or the groin (rather than the “uplifted head” of *Odes* 1.1); it is unkempt, and spotted with minor blemishes equivalent to the poet’s own overlookable peccadilloes. Horace’s most notorious affliction in the *Satires* is conjunctivitis: when he smears black cream onto his sore eyes on the journey south in *Sermones* 1.5, this is a kind of cautionary inoculation against other people’s blackening or accusations of moral shortsightedness, as well as a solipsistic act of defiance (it makes him blind to the arrival of Maecenas).⁵³ Similarly *Sermones* 1.7, the vicious court case in Brutus’ camp, is a blot on the book, a concentration of all the festering sores remembered from Caesar’s murder, Philippi, and the proscriptions.⁵⁴

Throughout the book, there is a tension between being part of the crowd and being sifted out of it (thanks to the discrimination of Maecenas), being a nobody or a somebody, a loner or a companion, free or tied. This is an essential aspect of the power relations between satirist and patron.⁵⁵ When Horace describes a typical day in his life, he spends it in conspicuously solitary fashion, hovering on the edge of city crowds and not dancing attendance on Maecenas. In *Sermones* 1.4 his maneuvers suggest ambivalence about being “in” or “out” of any circle: he perversely removes his “prosaic” satire from the category of real poetry, and shuns publicity – the promiscuous world of billboards, singing in the baths, and “smearing filth onto paper”; yet at the end he issues a threat from the center of a crowd of poets who want to bully everyone into joining their ranks. In *Sermones* 1.9 Horace starts off in a world of his own, but is forced by the end to play his part as one of the crowd, and to recognize his civic obligations.⁵⁶

It is important that Horace leaves traces of resistance throughout the book, both to make his friendship with Maecenas seem rocky and therefore more genuine, and to emphasize what satire has lost in being sweetened and toned down. Full-blooded satirists – Attic comedians, the witch Canidia, prowling informers, sparring entertainers in southern Italy, the squabbling litigants of Brutus’ camp – still haunt the poems, their malice not yet stamped out. In any case, Horace’s restraint is thrown into doubt by some of the

⁵² Zetzel (1980) 68.

⁵³ See Cucchiarelli (2001) 66–70 on bleary eyes as a political and scribal handicap.

⁵⁴ Henderson (1998) 91.

⁵⁵ Oliensis (1998a) 17–63 *passim* on the mixture of deference and independence in Horace’s relations with Maecenas.

⁵⁶ Mazurek (1997) on the law in Horace’s *Sermones*.

book's structural devices. Many of the poems end prematurely, as if playing safe – a freeze-framed chariot race (1.1), *coitus interruptus* (1.2), the end of the line at Brundisium (1.5), a stay of execution (1.7). And yet the “That’s enough now” (*iam satis est*) that is the catchword of Horatian satire comes at the end of only the first poem out of ten.⁵⁷ Horace then immediately breaks his promise not to add another word by launching into 1.2. The last poem, 1.10, looks at first like a recantation of the criticisms of Lucilius in 1.4, but turns out to be an emphatic restatement of them. For example, the demure phrase “I would not dare to remove the crown *sticking* to his head with abundant glory” (1.10.48–9) reminds us teasingly of the mud-slinging of 1.4.⁵⁸ In this poem the phrase “It is not enough” (*non satis est*) is applied to Horace’s perfectionist standards of literary composition (1.10.7). The last words, “Go, boy, and tack this on to the bottom of my book” (1.10.92), added on like a stop-press or postscript, open the way for book 2 and end the book on a defiant note of “publish and be damned.”

There was a five-year interval between the appearance of book 1 and that of its companion volume, book 2. Post-Actium, the sinister encroachments of imperial machinery make themselves felt: committees of civil servants, foreign campaigns, tax revenues, lobbyists, documents to be signed and sealed. Everywhere there is less room for maneuver. Horace has consolidated his position with Maecenas and satisfied his goals with a country seat, the Sabine farm, yet his movements are cramped by all the petitions and interference that go with the life of a celebrity. The law, in book 1 a convenient, depersonalized means of disposing of one’s enemies, has become an arcane system one needs to know inside out in order to survive.⁵⁹ Other obscure branches of knowledge, like cookery, legacy hunting, and court protocol, now compete with moral philosophy as routes to the good life.

Book 2, even more than book 1, is attuned to the reactions of its touchy audience. It opens by immediately confronting the contradictory criticisms of people who think the first book was too sharp (*nimis acer*) or too spineless (*sine neruis*) – a somewhat ironic note of despair, because this is exactly the kind of mixed reception a satirist would expect!⁶⁰ This supplementary volume is a rewriting of book 1 (*Sermones* 2.3.2, “unweaving everything you’ve written”), a readjusting of Horace’s social mask (cf. 2.8.84, “you return with your outward appearance changed”), a return to Maecenas (2.6.31, “you run

⁵⁷ Dufallo (2000).

⁵⁸ As the word “muddy” in the very next line indicates. ⁵⁹ S. 2.2.131.

⁶⁰ Or a perfect fusion of the humor and sharpness recommended at S. 1.10.14–15: Freudenburg (1990).

back to Maecenas”), a refashioning of a self-fashioned man (cf. 2.5.55–6, “a civil servant cooked up from a minor magistrate”). With only eight poems, book 2 is shorter than book 1. However, this is partly deceptive, as the third poem, the monstrous sermon by the Stoic convert Damasippus, is the length of three poems put together – a three-pound mullet (2.2.33–4) in itself.⁶¹ The book as a whole offers a strange impression of overload and selling short (*satura* versus *quod satis est*). Cooking, which in Latin shares so many terms with moral vocabulary – good, bad, sweet, bitter, healthy, sick, rotten⁶² – becomes, in its new pretentious form, the supreme agent of social malaise, with emphasis on the dyspeptic stomach, replacing the sore eyes of book 1.⁶³ Horace himself suffers from an embarrassment of riches, his own material gains (2.6.4, “I ask for nothing more”) mingled with dissatisfaction (2.8.18, “wretched wealth”).

There are two new frameworks for the poems of book 2. One is the symposium or *con-uiuium*, the high-minded gathering of friends, once a model for a perfect society, and now the ideal from which this collection, with its frequent allusions to Platonic dialogue and eight-poem structure (following the eight speakers at Plato’s *Symposium*), is such a falling off.⁶⁴ Companionship, one of the ideals of book 1, is now a nostalgic memory attached to the past or the uncorrupted countryside: the horseplay of Scipio and Laelius before an informal supper (in line with the “impromptu” character of Lucilian satire), a dinner guest released from crazy rules, the carefree herbs of a country mouse, the good old days of the unexpected guest and pot luck.⁶⁵ The pests and hangers-on who dogged Horace in *Sermones* 1 (cf. 1.6.102) have been replaced by an abstract, generalized anxiety (2.7.115, “the dark companion presses close and follows you as you run away”). The repressed civilities of 1.9 become naked abuse in 2.6, as Horace collides with anonymous ill-wishers in the street; “living with the great” (2.1.76), a recipe for contentment in *Sermones* 1, is now an unwanted responsibility (exposed in 2.5–8). By the end of book 2 Horace is still looking for a *conuiuia*, a dinner companion – or someone to live with.⁶⁶

The only ideal *sermo* in the book is the ethical conversation which bubbles up at a dinner of beans, greens, and bacon on Horace’s Sabine farm in *Sermones* 2.6. Otherwise, his choice of speakers is hardly utopian, and the disproportion between them and their host is grotesque. Horace symbolically

⁶¹ Jamie Masters first pointed this out to me.

⁶² Gowers (1993a) 132–3. ⁶³ S. 2.2.43, 77–8; 2.8.5.

⁶⁴ Cicero, *Ad familiares* 9.24.3; *De senectute* 13.45: the *conuiuium* is so-called because it is the occasion when we most truly live together. Platonic allusions: Anderson (1982) 41–9.

⁶⁵ S. 2.1.71–4; 2.6.68–9; 2.6.117; 2.2.90–92. ⁶⁶ S. 2.8.2.

relinquishes the power of speech to a series of self-appointed pundits and cranks: a jurist, a dispossessed farmer, a bankrupt antique dealer turned Stoic, a gourmet, the mythical prophet Teiresias, a slave, and a comedian.⁶⁷ Many of these could be termed “losers,” disenfranchised and down at heel, but born again through new philosophies.⁶⁸ Horace (except in 2.6) positions himself as listener to his own *sermones* and sufferer from writer’s block (2.2.2, “this talk isn’t mine”; 2.3.2, “you write so seldom”). After the confident dictation that ends book 1 (1.10.92, *subscribe* – “take this down”), he returns to his childhood role as a pupil taking instruction (2.1.5, *praescribe* – “dictate to me”), and preaches and practices silence.⁶⁹ Although original oracular speech is privileged over the written record, the fountains of wisdom, following Platonic precedent, are often drained only at second hand, from eavesdropping janitors or lecturers’ groupies.

As in book 1, Horace’s consumption of words is infected by his speakers’ ambitions. Old lessons in contentment have not been properly learned. Contrast the boatman’s words at 1.5.12 (“Squeeze in another three hundred; whoa! that’s enough”), where even a practical reckoning embodies Horace’s Callimachean program, with Damasippus’ relentless greed for figures at 2.3.116: “A thousand jugs full – that’s nothing; make it three hundred thousand!”⁷⁰ The gourmet Catus is similarly insatiable in his pursuit of the different branches of culinary knowledge: “It’s never enough to spend all your attention on just one area” (2.4.48).

But these second-hand speakers nevertheless enable Horace to get something said. Trebatius the jurist, advising Horace to lead a quiet life (*quiescas*) in 2.1, reformulates the position for the imperial satirist, who is incapable of writing fulsome military epic, but still slashes his sword in gestures of malice towards his perennially offendable audience, and is still inspired by his familiars – witches and vindictive judges. Although Horace is protected by his friendship with Maecenas, this is a case of “a sensible man preparing himself in times of peace for future outbreaks of hostility” (2.2.110), as well as an ironic re-entry into the satirical tradition.⁷¹ The countryman Ofellus tells us about the triumvirs’ rural dispossessions. Damasippus’ hectorings about human folly and inconsistency blow up in Stoic format many of the ethical themes of book 1. Catus’ rules for cuisine (a “subtle system of flavors,” 2.4.36) are a disguised “recipe” for Roman satire, encoding Horace’s

⁶⁷ Labate (1981) 26. ⁶⁸ Oliensis (1998a) 51–63.

⁶⁹ 2.5.90–1: “Beyond ‘No’ and ‘Yes,’ be silent”; 2.6.53: “‘Have you heard anything about the Dacians?’ ‘Nothing at all.’”

⁷⁰ Oliensis (1998a) 56 notes the second of these.

⁷¹ Anderson (1984), Clauss (1985), Freudenburg (1990).

innovative literary-critical principles – tasteful variety, discrimination, refinement – in a suitably irreverent portrait of an obsession.⁷² In 2.5 Horace tells us the new rules for insinuating oneself as an efficient courtier and legacy hunter (via a satirical Ulysses intent on rebuilding his fortunes), without openly endorsing them. And, to match these excessive or warped discussions, he offers virtuoso parodies of imbalanced *compositio* – the self-conscious placing of words.⁷³

The second frame for the book is the topsy-turvy festival of the Saturnalia, which allows two speakers, Davus and Damasippus, freedom of speech (exceptional, it is implied) to remove the smug mask Horace manufactured in book 1, and to undo all his strategic disavowal there of parasitism, hypocrisy, and ambition.⁷⁴ The slave and the Stoic expose inconsistencies in Horace himself, who plays town and country mouse by turn, or self-inflating pneumatic frog;⁷⁵ in their distorting mirror, his vices appear outsize. Instead of overblown panegyric or courtly praise (2.5.98), the book is stretched out with the abuse of self-directed satire. In 2.7 Horace the casual *flâneur* is called a jittery puppet on a string and a slave to a grand master; once self-sufficient, he is unable to spend a moment by himself.⁷⁶ In 2.3 his “Be quiet” comes not quite in time to conceal disproportionate revelations about his philandering, materialism, and choleric temper.

Although Horace and his companions profess a desire to learn throughout the book,⁷⁷ there is also great emphasis on the futility of learning. Book 1’s images of the child under instruction are replaced in 2.3 with Brueghelesque images of children’s games – leapfrog, riding a stick, doll’s houses, pinning a tail on someone else’s back – which reduce Horace to the stature of a pretentious pygmy, and the philosophical hobbyhorse itself, with its absurd exaggeration and crazy repetitions, to child’s play.⁷⁸ Fortune becomes the supreme games player (2.8.62–3, “How you always love to make sport of human affairs”), while Horace’s trivialized relationship with Maecenas (2.6.48–9: watching and playing sport together) becomes a model for the reception of satire.

As the slave Davus says in 2.7, “Feasts go sour if they go on too long” (107), and it is appropriate that the unexpectedly premature ending of *Satires* 2 is a dining-room farce which encapsulates the mixture of overabundance

⁷² Gowers (1993a) 135–61. ⁷³ Freudenburg (1996) on S. 2.3 and 2.4.

⁷⁴ S. 2.3.5 *Saturnalibus*; S. 2.7.4 *libertate Decembri*. McGann (1973) 72–84 on the crazy aspects of *Sermones* 2; Evans (1978), Freudenburg (1993) 211–23 on the Saturnalia.

⁷⁵ S. 2.7.29–37; 2.3.314–20. ⁷⁶ S. 2.7.82; 2.7.75; 2.7.112–13.

⁷⁷ E.g. S. 2.8.19; 2.3.33; 2.2.52.

⁷⁸ Huizinga (1949) 10, 143 on repetition and exaggeration as functions of play.

and dissatisfaction in the book so far.⁷⁹ Horace is not invited to the party, but there are aspects of him in several different *personae* on the inside of this tragicomic drama: the narrator, the contemporary comedian Fundanius, the pretentious host, Nasidienus, and the satirical guest, Balatro, who accompanies Maecenas and, unlike the frank dinner guests denigrated in book 1, blackens his host's name through muffled imperial sarcasm and hypocritical flattery. Nasidienus' elaborately devised menu invites the same verdict as Horace's satires at the start of 2.1: everything is either bitter or spineless (acidic *hors d'œuvres* which lash the stomach; arrangements of lacerated limbs). The host's running commentary only provokes dyspepsia and, ultimately, disgust in the guests, who shun the food as if it had been poisoned by a witch. And yet fiascos like a collapsing curtain provide them with satisfactory *unintended* entertainment at Nasidienus' expense ("There are no games I'd rather have watched than these"). Satire, Horace seems to be suggesting, has come a long way from its healthy social rôle. However, while it will never please its perpetually irritable audience on its own terms, it can, through self-parody and a hint of poison, achieve a kind of dysfunctional success, which is perhaps the most that can be hoped for from this unsatisfactory genre.

Further reading

The fullest commentaries on Horace, *Satires*, are Lejay (1911), Kiessling and Heinze (1957), Fedeli (1994). The most useful English editions are Brown (1993) and Muecke (1993); Palmer (1891) is not to be sniffed at. Essential reading includes Fraenkel (1957) 76–153, Rudd (1966), Anderson (1982) 13–150, Coffey (1989) 63–97 and Labate (1981) 5–45. Also recommended are the neat summary of Braund (1992) 16–25, and the milestone articles of McGann (1973), Zetzel (1980) on the slipperiness of *Satires* 1, and DuQuesnay (1984) on its political dimension. Recent stimulating work includes Freudenburg (1990; 1993; 1995; 1996) for pioneering investigations of literary-critical elements (see also Nilsson [1952] on metrical variety and Cartault [1899] for a catalogue of stylistic features); Henderson (1998) 73–107 and (1999) 171–227 combining new theoretical approaches with virtuoso close reading; Oliensis (1998a) 17–63 for a sophisticated socio-literary discussion of Horace's deference and independence in the *Satires*. There is a good prose translation by Rudd (1973); see Stack (1985) and Carne-Ross and Haynes (1996) for earlier translations. Martindale in Martindale and Hopkins (1993) 1–25 discusses the supreme adaptability of "Horace" for later generations; Burrow (1993) in Martindale and Hopkins (1993) is excellent on the appeal of Horatian elusiveness and rootlessness for sixteenth-century European court culture. There is a full, but not up-to-date, bibliography in Kissel (1981).

⁷⁹ Rather than that Horace was simply running out of ideas: *pace* Fraenkel (1957) 145. On 2.8: O'Connor (1990–1), Gowers (1993a) 161–79, Freudenburg (1995), Oliensis (1998) 57–61, Caston (1997).