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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

HORACE'S reputation since the Renaissance has been secure in spite of some ups and downs, but it has survived changes of fashion less by the universality than by the variety of his appeal. Some poets have pleased all the people some of the time, such as Pope and Tennyson; others have pleased some of the people all the time, and among these is Horace. He had many moods, his character was not entirely consistent, his words do not necessarily represent his views, and he changed as he grew older. The result is that he said and did many irreconcilable things, and his devotees, charmed by his personality and his verse, have had no difficulty in selecting for emphasis what has pleased them and neglecting the rest, each one quoting scripture to his purpose, each one re-creating Horace in his own image.

> Quaerit in hoc libro pariter sua dogmata quisque,
> inuenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua.

We English think of him as one of us; but it appears that no less to the French he is one of them, and even to the Germans one of them.[1] That is why he has proved inexhaustible; in each generation some section finds him particularly sympathetic; to each he will present a new aspect; for each he requires, and deserves, re-interpretation.

For my own part I feel that many Victorians, and writers like Professor Fraenkel as their latter-day representatives, have laid too much stress on his political significance and on the Stoic side of his character. To them he is essentially the *uates*, and they value most highly the poetry he wrote in this vein. The editor of the Loeb

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[1] But here I must quote the remark of a perceptive German, Karl Büchner, on Glover's *Horace, A Return to Allegiance* (Bursian, Bd. 267, p. 33): 'It is with astonishment that one notes again and again how congenial Horace's nature is to the English.'

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edition of the Odes, C. E. Bennett, writing in 1924, reflects this view clearly in his Introduction (p. viii): 'In content also many of his odes represent the highest order of poetry. His patriotism was genuine, his devotion to Augustus was profound, his faith in the moral law was deep and clear. Whenever he touches on these themes he speaks with conviction and sincerity, and often rises to a lofty level.'[1] It may be so; but is that the whole story? If it were, Horace would have lost many of his admirers in the present generation. What of all those other odes, which deal with the eternal platitudes—the brevity of youth, the vanity of human ambitions and the finality of death? Are these not sincere? Do these not 'rise to a lofty level'? And what of the many odes whose intangible beauty cannot be expressed in terms of subject-matter?

No less one-sided is the all too common view of Horace as a genial but rather superficial character whose most typical activity was drinking wine and uttering proverbial wisdom under a tree.[2] To give a balanced account of his personality is to walk the tight-rope,[3] and one approaches the attempt with diffidence. His life story has often been told,[4] but I have decided to restate so much of it as is certain or generally accepted, because this is necessary as a background, and also because there is a rich layer of fanciful conjecture, and a certain amount of definite misconception, to be cleared away. From consideration of his personality I shall pass on to my main subject, his lyric poetry.

Roger Fry spent a large part of his life in preaching to a fascinated but somewhat bewildered public that the only thing that really mattered about a picture was its formal qualities. He was driven to this by the insensitivity of his contemporaries to form, and himself achieved such aesthetic purity that he once astonished his audience

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[1] Cf. E. E. Sikes, *Roman Poetry*, p. 15; R. K. Hack, *Harvard Studies*, XXVII, 1916, pp. 31–2; and many others. For a more balanced view see Verrall in *Companion to Latin Studies* (1921), pp. 622–3.

[2] 'Fat, beery, beefy Horace' was a phrase constantly on the lips of one who was (otherwise) one of the best Classical teachers in England.

[3] No one, to my knowledge, has walked it so dexterously as T. R. Glover in his two lectures entitled *Horace, A Return to Allegiance*.

[4] Tenney Frank's account in *Catullus and Horace* is perhaps the fullest and most readable.

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at a lantern lecture by pointing to the central figure in an Entombment and beginning, 'This important mass here...'. But towards the end of his life he pronounced a notable palinode.[1] He had come round to the view that there was every degree in pictures. At one extreme was the purely narrative or descriptive, moving us, if at all, by its subject alone, and lacking any formal merit. Here he showed a slide of Poynter's 'Faithful unto Death'. At the other extreme was the abstract, or nearly so, illustrated by a still life of Cézanne, a picture strangely moving for some reason connected with the subconscious which it was for the psychologist, if anyone, to investigate. Between these there was every degree of combination, pictures which included most of the 'Old Masters', whose effect was due to a blend of form and content. And he finally announced his intention of atoning for the past by writing a book on 'Rembrandt as a Dramatist'.

Each of these kinds of picture has its admirers. In much the same way poems and their readers may be distinguished, though the analogy is by no means to be pressed. Some people read poetry primarily to enlarge their experience, or to see into the poet's mind and get to know his personality, or to find their own views better expressed than they could ever hope to express them, or to understand the mentality of past ages: in any case what most concerns them is the subject-matter. These, if they care for Horace at all, will probably say that they prefer the Satires and Epistles to the Odes and Epodes. It is surprising how many people do say so. *De gustibus non est disputandum*; but it must surely be conceded that serious poetic art has a *prima facie* claim to superiority over versified talk however witty.

On the other hand there are those who are especially susceptible to sounds and rhythms; who expect from poetry a more specifically aesthetic pleasure, and like poems that excel in this respect. There is (apart from odd experiments) no abstract poetry corresponding to abstract painting, though there is plenty of evidence of people being charmed by literature in an unknown tongue.[2] But in some poems form plays a larger part in relation to subject-matter than in others;

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[1] In his Sidgwick Lecture at Newnham College, Cambridge, in 1931, if not also elsewhere.

[2] As the boy Petrarch by Cicero, the boy Schliemann by Homer.

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Latin Elegy is a conspicuous example,[1] and the Horatian Lyric perhaps the most conspicuous of all. This is, indeed, a characteristic of all Latin Poetry, and the reason is not far to seek; not only were the Romans an uninventive race as regards literary subject-matter, but it was these formal qualities which they specially learnt to study and admire at their most impressionable age, as part of their careful training in rhetoric. They were obsessed by the beauty and strength of the Latin Language, and it may be doubted whether anyone who does not share this feeling will care greatly for the Odes; or, further, whether anyone who has not some taste for rhetoric will care for Latin Poetry as a whole, apart from a few authors who are not typical, such as Catullus and Lucretius.

Yet explaining why one likes an ode of Horace is as hard as explaining why one likes a picture. Art critics, unwilling to talk about the subject-matter of a picture where it is the form that they feel to be important, have taken refuge in not very illuminating metaphors—'plasticity', 'rhythm', even 'orchestration'. A similar helplessness afflicts the champion of Horace. And it may be that after all the only useful course is for the former to point to the picture, the latter to declaim the poem. Of attempts to characterise the Horatian ode the best known to me is that of Nietzsche: 'To this day I have got from no poet the same artistic delight as from the very first a Horatian ode gave me. In certain languages what is here achieved is not even to be thought of. This mosaic of words, in which every word by sound, by position and by meaning, diffuses its influence to right and left and over the whole; the minimum in compass and number of symbols, the maximum achieved in the effectiveness of those symbols, all that is Roman, and, believe me, of excellence unsurpassed.'[2]

But I do not wish to seem to be countenancing the old fallacy, that 'ingenium' and 'ars' are really separable; Horace himself was sound enough on that point, and those of his poems in which the two are not inseparably mated are dead. I am only insisting that 'ars' may be the dominant partner in some poetry. For this reason I have devoted considerable space to the question of how Horace

[1] Cf. M. Schuster, *Tibull-Studien* (1930), pp. 57 ff., where he suggests that Tibullus is a composer rather than a poet.

[2] x, 343. Quoted by Heinze, *Die Augusteische Kultur*, p. 111.

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gets his effects. I do not think that for most people the discussion of technique destroys the poetry, as Keats thought science had destroyed the rainbow; on the contrary it may increase the enjoyment, as I have found, for instance, in reading Robert Bridges' analysis of Keats' own poetry.[1]

It will be evident by now that for me Horace is the poet of the Odes and Epodes. That is not all, however. As a character I find him most sympathetic; I enjoy (or to be honest, I *quite* enjoy) reading the Epistles, when they are really letters, and the Satires when they approximate to the Epistles. I enjoy, in moderation, the parts of both that deal with literature. If Horace had written only his hexameter verse, I should prefer him to most Latin authors. But the greater part of the Satires presents obstacles to our enjoyment which are not mainly Horace's fault and which are almost insuperable. In the first place they are extremely difficult; and few readers who are not patient devotees can carry in their heads that knowledge of contemporary customs and gossip, even so much as is available, without which many of the allusions mean nothing. Here is a simile (Sat. II, 3, 60):

> Non magis audierit quam Fufius ebrius olim,
> cum Ilionam edormit, Catienis mille ducentis
> 'mater, te appello!' clamantibus.

I choose this example because the situation is quite amusing; but how many of those who only read Horace now and then will understand the reference? And then again, how many unfamiliar words there are in the Satires! What is meant to read like rapid and amusing chatter can barely survive a single peep at the notes or dictionary, let alone continual consultation. Besides this, there is nothing that changes more than taste in jokes. No reputable modern could write a piece like Satires I, 7, leading up to a rather feeble pun, nor would anyone now read it if it were not part of 'The Classics', a document of Roman social history. The unfortunate banquet of Nasidienus in II, 8 is less amusing than embarrassing to our sensibility, and the behaviour of Servilius Balatro, a Gratiano of whom Horace seems to approve, jars much more than his host's

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[1] Bridges' love of poetry began, significantly, with reading Ovid as a small boy at Eton. He always approached it from the artistic side.

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vulgarity amuses. Above all, both Satires and Epistles presuppose that interest in moral questions which, initiated by Socrates, pervaded the Graeco-Roman world. We can only relish such fare if it is of the lightest and served in very small helpings. Thus the First Satire, a 'diatribe' on avarice and discontent, is no longer very pleasurable reading.

For these reasons, though I shall often have occasion to refer to the hexameter poems, I have made the subject of this book 'Horace and his Lyric Poetry'.

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CHAPTER II

LIFE AND WORKS

In the brief account of Horace's life that follows, I have kept to established facts as far as possible; but there is one topic included which is more a matter of conjecture, the way in which his works were given to the world and received by it; as this is important for understanding them, I have thrown it somewhat into relief.

His father had begun life as a slave, but obtained his freedom and worked as a *coactor* (perhaps an auctioneer's assistant), finally settling down with a small property at Venusia, a military colony near the heel of Italy. Here his son was born on 8 December, 65 B.C. We hear nothing of the mother or of any other relatives, and perhaps it was freedom from family ties that enabled the father, impressed by his own rise in the world and by the obvious abilities of the child, to remove him from the rough company of the centurions' sons at the local school of Flavius and take him to Rome for his higher education.

The teachers there engaged for him were, if Orbilius is representative, the most eminent in the Capital. Under them he would read the early Latin poets, whom he came to regard patronisingly with a mixture of affection and contempt,[1] and he would perfect his knowledge of Greek, of which, as a South Italian, he probably possessed already at least a smattering; he would also study the rhetoric which contributed so much to his poetic style.

But no less important for his education was the influence of his father, who himself undertook the duties of 'paedagogus'. On their walks through Rome the shrewd countryman would comment on the absurdities which are taken for granted in a city where long tradition has made them seem natural, and point out one well-known figure as a warning, another as an example. There is no reason to doubt Horace's assertion that it was this experience which planted in him that interest in human character and conduct which so greatly influenced his choice of subjects when he discovered that he had poetic gifts.[2]

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[1] *Ep.* II, 1, 69–75. Quintilian recommended that all boys should be taught Greek before Latin, which they would pick up in any case: I, I, 12.

[2] *Sat.* I, 4, 103–26; 6, 81–8.

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The freedman who had thus made his only son his principal interest in life was not content to do things by halves; schooldays at Rome completed, he sent him to Athens for what we should call a University education:

> Scilicet ut uellem curuo dinoscere rectum
> atque inter siluas Academi quaerere uerum.

But into the pleasant social life of Athens and the sequestered calm of the Grove broke the news of Caesar's murder. Not long after came Brutus himself, who received a great welcome and settled down in all appearance to an academic life. The silent influence had its effect. All the Roman youth studying in Athens rallied to the companion of their lectures when the moment came to decide.[1] While some, like young Marcus Cicero, may well have been confirmed tyrant-haters, Horace's decision may be ascribed as plausibly to herd-instinct as to reasoned conviction. He accompanied the Republican army, it seems, to Macedon and Asia,[2] and by the time the rival forces clashed at Philippi he had been given the rank of military tribune. But in one of the several routs during the battle he made good his escape, and thereafter, instead of joining Sextus Pompeius with the die-hards, he returned to Italy 'with wings clipped', desiring only, we may suppose, to escape from the vortex into which he had so unsuitably been sucked.[3] His father was apparently dead, his inheritance was confiscated, and he was left at the age of twenty-three with the sole advantages of his own wits and the best education the world could provide. In the hope of collecting pence or patronage he now took to writing verse.[4] As models he chose Archilochus, the seventh-century iambic poet of Paros, who, besides being unappropriated as yet by any other Roman, had a pungent realism that would suit his mood, and Lucilius, the second-century Roman satirist, whose wide human interest and caustic wit would be no less congenial, while his artistic shortcomings invited competition. The Epodes and Satires occupied him during the next decade.

[1] Plut. *Brutus*, XXIV.

[2] *Sat.* I, 7. *Ep.* I, 11 mentions some of the places which Horace may have visited at this time.

[3] *Odes*, II, 7; *Ep.* II, 2, 49 f.

[4] *Ep.* II, 2, 51 f.

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The general amnesty of 39 B.C. no doubt improved the situation; at any rate Horace procured the modest post of clerk in the Treasury. Meanwhile he was obtaining repute, and in some quarters notoriety, by his mordant verse. So promising a poet could scarcely escape the notice of Virgil, who would also be naturally sympathetic to any Meliboeus who had lost his land in the troubles. Virgil and Varius introduced him to Maecenas about the spring of 38 B.C.,[1] and nine months later he was invited to join their circle. He did not however abandon his clerkship, for seven years later he represents himself as maintaining a not undistinguished, if unlaborious, connection with the Treasury.[2] Nor did he go to live in Maecenas' house; for he tells of the frugality of his own table at Rome, and several years later he still dines with his patron only, it appears, by invitation.[3]

In the meantime he was reading extensively, if not deeply, from all periods of literature. He was fond of sleeping late, playing games, and wandering about the City to watch the strange characters of all sorts who congregated in the poorer quarters. There were also stormy love affairs, if the Epodes may be taken as evidence. About 35 B.C. he collected and published ten of his satires in book form. This does not mean that they were now made public for the first time, for in the Fourth he defends himself against accusations of malice and in the Tenth against the affronted admirers of Lucilius. Nor need we suppose that these were all the satires he had written.

A political lull followed the defeat of Sextus Pompeius in 36 B.C. It was during this period that Horace was presented by Maecenas with the famous farm and estate in the valley of the Digentia among the Sabine Hills, about fourteen miles beyond Tibur.[4] Eight slaves

[1] *Sat.* I, 6, 55 ff. This delay of nine months may have been partly due to Maecenas' absence in the South, where he was sent as Octavian's envoy to Antony, rather than to any design.

[2] *Sat.* II, 6, 36.

[3] *Sat.* I, 6, 114–18; II, 7, 32–5. Gardthausen's statement to the contrary seems incorrect (*Augustus und seine Zeit*, I, p. 782). Augustus' suggestion mentioned in the Suetonian *Life* that Horace should leave Maecenas' 'parasitic table' to be his secretary is not to be taken too literally, and probably belongs in any case to a later period.

[4] See G. Lugli, *Horace's Sabine Farm* (1930), pp. 45–6.

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were employed on the farm, and when one remembers that there were also five tenant-farms attached,[1] one takes with a grain of salt the remarks Horace makes about the modesty of his circumstances.

Those who thought peace was now assured were too sanguine. An acrimonious correspondence between Octavian and Antony led to a definite rupture in February, 32 B.C., and war was declared against Egypt in the name of the Roman State in the summer of that year. Horace was naturally on the side of Maecenas and his leader. Despite assertions to the contrary, it is unlikely that either he or Maecenas was present at the battle of Actium. The result of that battle and the capture of Alexandria made lasting peace a possibility, provided that Octavian refrained from reprisals.

Not only the dawn of peace, but also a personal triumph, must have made the year 30 a happy one for Horace. The mood that had made Archilochus sympathetic to him had passed with the improvement in his fortunes. Already in some of the Epodes a milder spirit was beginning to show itself, and finally he turned to other sources of inspiration, or, at any rate, of metre—to the early lyric poets of Greece, Alcaeus and Sappho.[2] The first task was to adapt their metres to the Latin ear. He did not, as some have thought, consult a metrical handbook; but he did introduce a considerable number of rules: thus he made Asclepiads, Glyconics, Pherecrateans, and usually Alcaic hendecasyllables begin with a spondee; he made the fourth syllable of the Sapphic and the fifth syllable of the Alcaic hendecasyllable almost invariably long; and above all he introduced regular caesuras into several types of line. Detailed analysis suggests that his object was to eliminate from his Aeolic verse anything that might suggest iambic, trochaic or dactylic rhythm. Now in so doing he was not making any startling innovation. We are apt to forget that these metres had been used by Hellenistic poets whose work has been almost completely lost. From the surviving fragments it appears that he was simply regularising what had already

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[1] *Sat.* II, 7, 118; *Ep.* I, 14, 1–3.

[2] He did not attempt to *imitate* Sappho. Nor did he have much in common with Alcaeus as a man; but he would appreciate his personal note, his style and his metres. See Wilamowitz, *Sappho und Simonides* (1913), p. 309.