
INTRODUCTION

1 A SECOND BOOK OF *SERMONES*

Horace (hereafter “H.”) wrote the first book of his *Sermones* (“Conversations,” commonly known as “Satires”) in the aftermath of Philippi (October, 42 BCE), where he had fought on the side of Caesar’s assassins. As a military tribune under Brutus, he supported the cause of *libertas* (Republican “freedom”) against Antony and Octavian, who had taken up the deceased dictator’s cause. On 3 September, 36 BCE, in the waters off the coast of Naulochus in northeast Sicily, Octavian (with Agrippa marshalling his fleet) finished off the last of Rome’s Republican freedom fighters. In fact, both sides that day fought to free the Roman people from the “enslavement” of the other. Both had emblazoned their cause as one of filial duty (*pietas*): Sextus Pompey fighting to avenge the death of his father, Pompey the Great, and Octavian to avenge the death of his “father” (by adoption *post mortem*), Julius Caesar. Each man was trying to “out-Republican,” “out-freedom” and “out-pious” the other by killing him, along with however many thousands of his fellow Romans he needed to kill in order to get the job done. Only then, once his father’s killer had been killed, could he, the poor grieving son, declare his father successfully avenged and make his way to the barber for a long-overdue shave. For as ruinous and regrettable as this contest was, it was also confusing, bombastic, self-serving and ridiculous. It was utterly ripe for satire.

Later that same year, or early the next, H. published the first book of the *Sermones*, poems in which the cruel hypocrisies and vainglory of Rome’s recent, and ever forthcoming wars, like scenes of bloody dismemberment in a Greek tragedy, are kept decorously out of sight.¹ Not only is Naulochus not mentioned in this book, no hint of it has ever been detected. For by the time *Sermones* 1 is published (mere months after Naulochus), H. has escaped the political fray and put together a new life for himself in Rome. That is where his main focus is in the generous snippets of autobiography that he provides: not on times regrettable, bloody and turbulent, whether present, on the horizon, or in the very near past, but on the better times of his own recent success; not the battered and ruined H., but the H. who has gotten back on his feet, using his poetic

¹ On dating the *Sermones*’ first book to late 36/early 35 BCE, see DuQuesnay 1984: 20–1 and Gowers 1–5.

talents, his sharp wits and un-pushy, ironic demeanor as a means of social and financial re-integration.²

With the help of Virgil and Varius, H. was introduced to Maecenas (*S.* 1.6.54–5), the magnificently wealthy and stylish Etruscan whose name is now a synonym for “patron” in English, and actually is the word itself in German (*Mäzen*), Spanish (*mecenas*) and Italian (*mecenate*).³ Best known as a connoisseur of expensive luxuries and a collector of poets, Maecenas maintained Octavian’s active presence in Rome while he was away at war. His political power, though entirely unofficial, was anything but trivial. With unlimited resources at his disposal, Maecenas gathered in the best of Rome’s best (Virgil, Varius and Horace, along with a number of less famous others) and he took them on as “friends” (*amici*). For H., Maecenas was the harbor that took him in after the storm, a haven on an enemy shore. For Maecenas, H. was a rising star, a gem to be added to his collection, expertly selected to symbolize not only the exquisite quality of his aesthetic judgment, but the impressively wide reach of his, and, by extension, Octavian’s, magnanimity and *clementia*.

Like H., Lucilius, the “inventor” of the genre that H. takes up, had been a soldier, having fought under Scipio at Numantia in 135–133 BCE. Unlike H., Lucilius returned from his war a winner, exceedingly wealthy, and with nothing to regret. Although it cannot be known, it is likely that he paraded in Scipio’s Numantine triumph of 132 – the triumphant general was a close, personal friend. Upon his return to Rome (here once again H. resembles him), Lucilius began writing satire. That is where the similarities end. In his *Satires* (originally published in thirty books, from which nearly 1,300 fragments survive), Lucilius speaks openly about his days in Scipio’s army, and the wars they fought together, against foes foreign and far away. He writes not just as a winner, but like a winner, penning satires that sound the part. In contrast, the autobiographical poems that form the center of Horace’s first book of *Sermones* (4, 5 and 6), thereby emphasizing the centrality of autobiography to the form itself, tell of the poet’s early years as a student in Rome, under the watchful eye of his father, a south Italian farmer who had once been a slave, and who was eager to see his son claim a better life for himself (1.4.103–31, 1.6.71–99). H. tells of his introduction to Maecenas in 39/38 BCE, the interview where he

² For the possibility that H. served in some military capacity in Octavian’s war against Sextus Pompey in 36, and perhaps also again against Antony in 31, see N–H, vol. I: xxvii and N–R *ad Carm.* 3.4.28 *nec Sicula Palinurus unda*.

³ For a recent summary of Maecenas’ personal and political career, see Gowers 2017.

said little, but was up front about his having fought on the losing side at Philippi (1.6.45–64). He describes his travels in the great man's entourage in 37 (1.5), and the worry-free new life that he now lives in Rome, as an Epicurean who has seen the error of his youthful ways (1.6.104–31). The genre of satire, to which these *Sermones* belong, is remarkably forthcoming with details about the poet's own life (Juvenal is the genre's one notorious exception to this rule). Such forthcomingness about oneself, giving flesh and a history to the voice, is both an aspect of, and a way of instantiating, the genre's signature *libertas*. But the three to four years that separate the poet's personal disaster at Philippi in late 42 from his initial introduction to Maecenas in late 39/early 38 are a locked box; years that have gone missing from this satirist's (otherwise quite detailed) life. One insignificant event, apparently from his days as a soldier in Brutus' army, is sported with in *Sermones* 1.7, and some have spied political violence lurking in the shadows of 1.8.⁴ But in neither poem does the poet draw any explicit connections to his own life.

With the poetic form that H. had inherited from Lucilius came expectations of Greek *parrhesia* (literally "telling all") and Latin *libertas* ("freedom of speech"). But in this "tell all" genre, as H. chose to reformulate it, the emphasis in the *Sermones'* first book is on the need to curtail and to refrain from telling all: Epicurean contentment (routinely cast in terms of self-"containment"), aesthetic refinement, artful dodging and culturally decorous rescission are H.'s new way of expressing the genre. All are mutually entailed, each an expression of the other. As remade by H., satire is a genre where silences must be maintained, and where silences speak loudly. One must listen for them. The title of the work, the *Sermones*, is itself a way of not saying *Saturae*. H. hints at the more obvious title at the end of *Sermones* 1.1 (in the famous *satis/satura* pun of lines 119–20, and perhaps again in the "Satureian horse" of 1.6.59), but he does not say it. The connotations of *Sermones* ("Conversations") are far more sociable and unthreatening than are those conveyed by the term *Saturae*. Thanks to Lucilius, that title was loaded with jarring connotations: verbal aggression, political wrangling, bold self-assertion, caustic wit. Not until the first line of the *Sermones'* second book does H. refer to his poems as satires, but even there he holds the designation at arm's length by assigning it to certain unnamed others who had disparaged his poems as "overly harsh." The term belongs to their language of disparagement and contributes to it, even as it is used by H., for the first time, to name his poems "Satires."

⁴ On recent Republican violence darkening the laughter, and defying the surface triviality, of *Sermones* 1.7 and 1.8, see Gowers 250–2 and 263–5.

Whereas the first book of the *Sermones* charts the poet's movement toward establishing a new life for himself in Rome in the aftermath of Philippi, the second book describes him living a life that is, by now, five or six years further on, fully established: plush with creature comforts (a new villa in the Sabine hills, luxurious dinners, famous friends, etc.), but not quite what he was after. The idea that one might re-write satire as H. had done in the first book of *Sermones*, that is as an expression of Epicurean values, detached from the world of politics and focused on the project of the poet's own inner contentment, was always a curious stretch for the genre that Lucilius had invented. For Lucilius, writing was a form of fighting – this, at least, is the odd and partial (but, regarding his reception, the most lasting) impression left by the collection's important lead books: 26 and 27, the first two books of the early polymetric collection, and 1 and 2, the first two books of the hexametric satires.⁵ In these introductory books, Lucilius goes after the powerful, the corrupt, the self-serving and ridiculous. He goes to the forum both to take in and *take part in* the wranglings of Roman political life: the heavenly *concilium* of book 1 (Lucil. frs. 1–46W) is crafted as a contentious meeting of the senate, with individual gods playing the roles of known senators. The famous censorial speech of Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus promoting marriage is sent up in book 26. The botched trial of the corrupt governor of Asia, Quintus Mucius Scaevola, is the farce of book 2. And so on. For Lucilius, the posturing, deceit and nest-feathering that took place in the Roman forum was the standard grist of his satiric mill; cf. the famous, and unusually long “battle of the forum” fragment (1145–51W = 1228–34M), best assigned to the heavenly corruption trial of *Satires* 1.⁶

For his part, and in clear contrast to what Lucilius had done, H. keeps his distance from the political fray. He goes to the forum only twice in his *Sermones'* first book: in 1.6 he “meanders through” the forum after hours (*uespentinumque pererro* | *saepe forum*, *Sermones* 1.6.113–14). There he looks in on the soothsayers before heading home for a meal of chickpeas and leeks. He has no particular business there, and nothing of any significance to report. At that hour, there are no politicians in sight. In 1.9, however, he makes the rather large mistake of entering the forum during working hours. There, as he ambles through while rehearsing a

⁵ On the early publication history of Lucilius' *Satires* that accounts for their odd numeration (books 26–30, in fact, being the earliest poems in the entire collection), see Gratwick 1982: 168–9 and Warmington xx–xxiv.

⁶ A compelling case for assigning Lucilius' “battle of the forum” fragment to book 1 of the *Satires* is made by Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990.

poem, he is latched onto by a power-hungry aspiring poet who has spotted him as prey. Troping their encounter as a drawn-out battle that H. is too unwarlike to fight, H. is forced to endure the man's aggressive and unrelenting sales pitch until, at the poem's end, both men are hauled into court where neither of them wants to be. By this point, near the end of the first book, H.'s newfound success is spied exacting a cost. Everyone wants a piece of him now that he is a well-connected minor celebrity. In the first book the cost that the poet pays for his newfound, and quite remarkable success, is calculated in terms of envious stares and taunts endured in *Sermones* 1.6 (45–8), and the waste of a single bad day in *Sermones* 1.9. However, in the second book the envious stares are keener, and what had been a single bad day has now become the poet's entire life. In *Sermones* 2.6 he describes the whole of his average day consumed by obligations that need to be attended to: a constant, onerous back-and-forth between Maecenas' Esquiline mansion and the forum, then off to the Campus Martius to endure the envious stares that are directed at him in the company of his great friend. By this point, the poem suggests, H. has no privacy, no free time, no life of his own. Owing to Octavian's victory at Actium, he is no longer a minor celebrity. He is a major one. The son of a freed slave now consorts with the gods. Whether he wants it or not, the Epicurean "ambler" and escapist, once so happy with chickpeas and leeks, now wields significant political power.

Besides offering a full and comically bitter exploration of his life in 2.6, H. provides further details about his south Italian background in 2.1, and matters touching on his current life are folded into the dialogue at the beginning and end of both 2.2 and 2.3. *Sermones* 2.7 reveals scandalous life details that hover somewhere between lurid biographical exposé (they are described not by H., but by his eavesdropping slave, Davus), autobiography (H. writes the poem wherein Davus describes his life) and comic fiction (both H. and his slave occupy obvious comic roles). But the great bulk of the second book finds H. not talking about himself, but letting others have their say. Whereas the predominant narratological mode of *Sermones* 1 was that of conversationally peppered "live" monologue and story-telling, with two poems addressed to Maecenas (1.1 and 1.6), and the eight remaining poems to no one in particular (1.2–5, 7–10), in *Sermones* 2 the predominant mode is that of "live" conversation that readers listen in on in secret. In the so-called "diatribe satires" of the first book (1.1–3), formal conversational features function as devices for steering the conversation in certain directions. Out of the blue, fictive interlocutors interrupt and pose silly objections, only to disappear until needed again. The satires of the second book are conversations in a more obvious sense.

This is not to say that the individual satires of *Sermones* 2 are evenly balanced in the conversations they give us to overhear, or that they are always easy to account for as conversations. In five of the poems, H. cedes the floor to interlocutors who have much wisdom to convey (2.2–4, 2.7), or a great story to tell (2.8). His own role as a conversation partner tends to be pushed to the edges of beginning and end by persons who are bursting with things that they want to say. In *Sermones* 2.3, the second longest poem in the Horatian corpus, the initial conversation gives way to an inset moral sermon of more than 200 lines, and turn-taking is similarly minimized in other poems (2, 4, 7) where all-knowing preachers hold forth on issues that are dear to their hearts and that, they are convinced, their listener(s) desperately need to hear. Nodding toward the *Odes*,⁷ *Sermones* 2.6 has the form of a mock-lyrical soliloquy (self-conversation), and yet it hints at having a specific addressee: a case of satiric content conveyed through the poem's unique form (see the introductory essay to 2.6 below). The two poems of the book that most accurately convey the idea of conversation are 2.1 and 2.5, both of which feature interlocutors who seek advice from experts (H. from Trebatius in 2.1, and Odysseus from Tiresias in 2.5), and where both experts and advisees take frequent turns listening and speaking.

The opening lines of book 2 deliver a surprise: they seem, at first glance, to situate readers in familiar territory, with the satirist taking up where he had left off in *Sermones* 1.10, by having yet another go at his detractors. But the vocative form *Trebatii* (“oh, Trebatius”) at the end of the fourth line causes one to rethink and recalibrate what one has just read. Only here does one suddenly realize that the old narratological premises of the first book no longer apply: the satirist is not speaking directly to his readers, as he had done so often in the first book, but to a character inside the poem. Readers of this poem, and of all that follow in the second book (including 2.6, which is only “somewhat” an exception to this), find themselves differently placed in their relationship to the speaking that happens on the page, pushed just a bit farther out from conversations that they are given to hear. This is a book where readers are no longer being talked to. Rather, they are listening in, treated to a series of miniature dramas where

⁷ As H. writes *Sermones* 2, he is already at work on his *Odes*, and his *Epodes* (the earliest of which appear to date to the mid-thirties) are on the verge of being published as a completed work. For the relevance of these “other” works to H.'s second book of *Sermones*, see Freudenburg 2006 and nn. below at 1.18, 48, 2.104, 3.11–12, 3.23–5, 6.2, 17–23, 51, 93, 7.95–101, 8.94–5. For the possibility that some odes were written as early as 35 BCE and that many were written between 35 and 30, see N–H, vol. I: xxviii–xxx.

the satirist chooses to stay in character, and where he does not look out toward his readers, the way that poets of Greek Old Comedy do in their *parabases*, and say “the point I’m making to all of you out there is this.” As such, these conversations leave readers significant work to do, because whatever point they might be thought to make about whatever the talk concerns must be ferreted out, and decided upon, by readers themselves. Even the animal fable of *Sermones* 2.6 lacks the usual moral tag at the end to tell us what it means. Whatever moral(s) we are to take from it we must supply for ourselves.

2 *FABULA DE TE NARRATUR*: SATIRE AND SELF-IRONY IN *SERMONES* 2

Much of the talk that one overhears in *Sermones* 2 issues from the mouths of zealots who push their way forward and speak emphatically for their cause. They are easy to peg as know-it-all whose narrow fanaticism and lack of cultural scruples speak for themselves. But to identify them as the self-satirizing targets of these poems, happily hoist by their own petard, hardly catches the whole of what they do. It takes him a while, but the Stoic preacher Damasippus, the biggest talker of the entire book, finds H.’s weak spot near the end of 2.3 (307–26), when he scolds him for his stylish mode of conspicuous consumption as the owner of a new luxury villa, and for his eagerness to keep up appearances and to stay toe-to-toe with his patron, Maecenas. It turns out that Damasippus himself had once cared deeply about these same things: before the bankruptcy that brought about his near suicide and his conversion to Stoicism, he had been a real estate baron, a style consultant and buyer of luxury goods for Rome’s *nouveaux riches*. By the time the fiction of *Sermones* 2.3 kicks in, not only is he “done with all that” *because of* his bankruptcy, that is done with expensive luxuries because he can no longer afford them. Rather, according to his new way of viewing and valuing reality, his bankruptcy, the “disaster” that brought about the loss not only of all of his property, but of his friends and of the high status that he had enjoyed as an expert in matters of stylish consumption, was the best thing that ever happened to him. Losing all he had caused him to find a new kind of security in himself, rather than in the trappings of Roman “success.”

The question then is: is Damasippus really so altogether ridiculous? Easily spotted as the butt of the joke, is the point that he is to be chided with a knowing laugh for being so unlike the stylish satirist to whom he speaks, and for being so out of step with what matters to H. and to Maecenas, men whom we are to consider worth admiring? Or is he rather (perhaps “also”) to be admired for having put his life back together after

all was lost, for requiring no wealthy patron to put him back on his feet, for having found resources for his recovery inside himself and, perhaps most importantly, for no longer caring what others think? His newfound happiness in the aftermath of his personal disaster is not in question. But that of H. certainly is. What is true of Damasippus in 2.3 might be said of Ofellus in 2.2, an old Italian farmer, rough around the edges, and terribly funny for being so antediluvian in his attitudes and so unstylish in his ways (even praising the virtues of rancid pork!, 89–92). Like H., he had lost his farm in the land confiscations after Philippi. And yet, amazingly, he does not care. The loss has not affected him in any meaningful way. Happy with the basic “enough” that nature requires, and contemptuous of fortune’s cruel whims, he lives the same life that he has always lived. His is the detached and unassailable Epicurean life that H. has been talking about since the first lines of *Sermones* 1.1; the life he talks about, but cannot seem to live.

The obvious targets of these poems are merely low-hanging fruit. The better apples are higher up and much harder to reach. Circling back to Damasippus, he knows that his shaggy beard looks ridiculous, but he does not care. To point at the man’s shaggy beard and judge him shaggily bearded (or overly zealous, rhetorically overblown, stylistically sloppy, and so on) can hardly be the point. To borrow an analogy that Persius draws near the end of his programmatic first satire, to peg Damasippus overblown and inept is to taunt a one-eyed man for having one eye (*sordidus et lusco qui possit dicere “Lusce!”* “and the bottom-dweller who says ‘hey there, One-eye!’ to a one-eyed man,” Pers. 1.128). That is neither the whole, nor is it even remotely the best, of what H. is doing with the book’s ongoing parade of odd and self-assured characters, from Ofellus in 2.2 to Nasidienus in 2.8, all so free with advice because they are so passionate about what they know, and so happy with who they are. H. did a lot of self-assured moral preaching of his own in the first book, and those earlier performances are repeatedly brought to mind in *Sermones* 2, in intensified versions that serve not only to mark off differences between (sensible) H. and the (unpolished, unbalanced) characters he creates, but to locate and amplify the absurd potentials of what H. has been treating us to all along. Put simply, to hear H. “in them” finds us re-hearing H. “as them.” They are instruments of retrospection and self-irony: a way of hearing him differently.

This can be said not only of the book’s several moral preachers, but of its Epicurean culinary gurus, Catus in 2.4 and Nasidienus in 2.8, whose enthusiasms, stylistic tenets and metaphorical conceits in many cases rhyme powerfully with those espoused by H. himself, as well as with those

of certain prominent others whose company he keeps: Maecenas and the meticulously fussy poets of his circle. Like comically warped images that peer out from a funhouse mirror, the many “mock Horace” figures of *Sermones* 2 function as absurdist refractions of their creator and of those who stand alongside him to peer in and laugh. Even the comically venal Odysseus of 2.5 bears certain highly specific resemblances to H. that invite us to see the satirist wickedly reimagined in the character he creates. Both men, Odysseus in Homer’s myth and H. in his actual life, have had their ancestral estates overrun by others while away at war. Both strive to put their lives back together and to recover what they have lost. For as comically venal and darkly driven as Odysseus is in 2.5, his quest touches on things very real in the lives of countless Romans returning from war. Instead of urging the wily hero to craft a plan to dispel the suitors, Tiresias advises him (11–14) to get with the Roman times by snaring a big patron and playing him for all he is worth. That, Tiresias insists, is how Odysseus will recover what he has lost.

In the first lines of *Sermones* 2.6, H. expresses his heartfelt thanks to his patron, as to a god, for his new villa in the Sabine hills (on *Maia nate* and *Matutinus* as sonic stand-ins for *Maecenas*, see 5 and 20 nn.). The transition from 2.5 (“shamelessly grease a gullible patron and riches will come your way”) to 2.6 (“thank you, rich patron, for my magnificent new home”) is abrupt, and produces a wicked analogy. For the briefest of passing moments (this is not an allegorical key, but a momentary intimation), it prompts us to take a comically dim view of the highly idealized, and always deeply mystified, relationships of Maecenas to his poets. In fact, *Sermones* 2.5 treats us to the sounds of known poetic flatteries on several occasions. At least two of these are easy to identify: infelicitous lines of Furius Bibaculus’ *Annales Belli Gallici* are mocked in lines 39–41, and the adulatory sounds of Virgil’s fourth *Eclogue* play inside lines 62–4 (see the relevant nn.). Both poets, the one a favorite target of H.’s satiric barbs (Furius is derided as a “poet for pay” already at 2.1.12–15) and the other his close friend, can be heard supplying background music to Odysseus’ nefarious schemes.

Already in the first poem of the *Sermones*’ first book, H. warned readers to be wary of laughing too glibly at the tales he tells: *quid rides? mutato nomine de te fabula narratur* (“what are you laughing at? Change the name and this story is about you,” *Sermones* 1.1.69–70). Easy targets, such as Furius Bibaculus, lure us in to laugh. But as we float along on that laughter we suddenly come to realize that others are implied as well: often it is we ourselves. To find Maecenas’ star poets, H. and Virgil (the Quintus and Publius of 5.32?), as well as the great patron himself, implied by the

“flattery for pay” arrangements of the fifth poem is satirically trenchant, certainly. But it is not necessarily to find out who they all really are. Rather, it is to be induced to reimagine the relationships that bind them, the fabulously rich patron to his fabulously enriched poets, in the bluntest of Roman terms, and exactly as uncharitable others (or are they to be considered bluntly honest others?) were wont to see them.

3 STRUCTURE, PLOT AND TIME IN *SERMONES* 2

The rough transition from 2.5 to 2.6 is a case of structural arrangement that produces a satiric effect. Importantly, it is the linear arrangement of the poems, that is their being read in sequence, that matters in this case, not the balanced architectural spans that reach across entire poems or groups of poems to structure the book as a whole. Those larger, non-linear arrangements were well explored by F. Boll in 1913, who divided the book into interlaced halves: poems 1 and 5 are consultations; 2 and 6 treat country themes; 3 and 7 feature Stoics preaching during the Saturnalia; 4 and 8 feature Epicurean culinary experts. Boll’s study was subsequently expanded and refined by Ludwig 1968, who identified a more complex set of balances operating within Boll’s overall frame. In introducing the structural patterns of *Sermones* 2, Muecke 1993: 8–9 takes things in a new direction by identifying a series of “significant contrasts” that crop up as we read the poems in their numerical sequence, such as the jolting transition from 2.5 to 2.6 (just mentioned), and a similar rough transition from 2.6 to 2.7, as the idealized rustic dream of H. gives way to Davus undercutting that dream by describing it as a hypocritical pose. All of these proximate transitions produce satiric effects by setting things side-by-side that are hard to square. One sees this already in the first poem, which ends with H. establishing that he has nothing to fear in speaking his mind, giving us to think that he intends to speak forthrightly, in ways that might offend persons in power. He then promptly proceeds to do nothing of the sort, instead letting an old Italian farmer have his say on the virtues of a simple rustic diet (*nec meus hic sermo est* “this talk isn’t mine,” *Sermones* 2.2.2).

Whereas the larger architectural links help us appreciate the book as a structured whole, it is in reading the poems sequentially that one actually experiences the book developing into that whole.⁸ As part of the process of reading sequentially, one senses a gradual progression through time,

⁸ In his pioneering study of the “structure of ambiguity” in *Sermones* 1, Zetzel 1980: 64 argues that “the major structure of a book like the Satires or Eclogues is simply the order of the poems and the changing impressions made by each