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Introduction

> Are you so mad as to want to have your poems turned into dictation exercises at downmarket schools?
>
> *(Satires 1.10.74–5)*

If Europe in the twenty-first century is formally united at all, it is because of the Treaty of Rome, 1957. Why Rome? Rome is a symbol of European civilization. It was a centre of empire. But not simply of political control. The forms, the architecture, the language and even the ideology of the Roman empire passed to the Roman Catholic Church, whose authority still represents in sketchy and ghostly form the magnificence of its predecessor. In both we see a mighty organization responsible to a single supreme director at its centre and sharing a belief, often a sense of mission, with that controller. If any single person can be credited with the invention of this system, it is Julius Caesar's great-nephew, the emperor Augustus. Single-minded, determined, often ruthless, he rescued Rome when it seemed on the verge of collapsing in the uncontrolled competition of its leading citizens. He brought back peace and order. He had an idea of what Rome ought to be. Horace and Virgil, both of them well known to the emperor as people and as poets, took part in the creation of this idea and in its dissemination to that literate class of citizens which held the empire together.

If I put it like this, I risk making Horace seem impossibly remote and lofty. There certainly are grand passages in his poetry. But anyone who reads Horace will come to see him in a very different light. He speaks directly to his reader in a huge variety of registers from solemnity to fun and from abstraction to the most down-to-earth realism. The personality he presents in his poems is one with which the reader can easily feel on familiar terms. In fact the risk is not that he may seem remote, but that we shall feel too confident that we know him. Horace himself warns us against this: he sets traps, such as the passage where he seems to be recording confidential advice from his father – which turns out to be a re-presentation of a scene from one of Terence's comedies of 150 years before. He is a poet whom it is always necessary to read, as the great Horatian scholar Eduard Fraenkel said, *perpurigatis auribus* – with ears most thoroughly cleaned out.[1]

1 A great deal has been written in recent years to discourage us from taking apparently autobiographical statements by poets at face value. But, as Philip Hills says, 'what Horace wrote about himself, although highly stylized, was part of a wider social "performance" that he could not simply disown once published' (p. 11). That is, Horace had said 'I' so often that he could not very easily say to his contemporaries, 'Actually, I meant someone else, quite imaginary.'

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Horace's life

Horace (his full name was Quintus Horatius Flaccus) was born on 8 December 65 BC at Venusia in south-eastern Italy.[2] His father was a freedman (freed slave: *libertus*), a fact Horace tells us was much used against him when he was making his way in life. The name, however, shows no sign of origin as a non-citizen, nor is there any suggestion that the family depended on a patron, as freedmen did upon the person who had given them freedom. It is very possible that Horace's father was in origin a free citizen of Venusia, but suffered temporary enslavement as a boy or very young man when the town was captured by the Roman army in the war of 91–88 BC between Rome and the Italian communities, the so-called Social War.

His father was in fact reasonably well off, with a 'small' farm and a trade as *coactor* ('financial manager in an auctioneering business' is a clumsy translation). He was able to move his son to Rome for most of his schooling and subsequently to send him to university in Athens. He was there in 44 BC when Marcus Brutus, one of the assassins of Julius Caesar, was also in Athens raising an army to fight in the name of the republic against Mark Antony and Caesar's adoptive son, his great-nephew, Octavian. Horace joined Brutus and during the following two years became a senior legionary officer (*tribunus militum*). At the battle of Philippi in 42 he shared in the defeat of the republican forces. Returning penniless (so he suggests) to Rome, he nonetheless secured appointment as a treasury clerk (*scriba quaestorius*). (One can make guesses at whose patronage helped him secure this place, but all Romans had friends on both sides in the civil wars of the period.) As a friend of Virgil he was introduced to Gaius Maecenas, one of Octavian's most powerful assistants. Maecenas took Horace into his wide circle of patronage and his personal friendship. Through Maecenas Horace came to the attention of Octavian, who treated him with familiarity and at one stage proposed that he should become one of his confidential secretaries. Octavian (who was perhaps Augustus by now) did not resent it, says his biographer Suetonius, when Horace refused. He wished to remain independent. A symbol of this independence was the small estate in the hills near Rome which he acquired, probably with the help of Maecenas, some time in the 30s.

2 Details of Horace's life are given in a short biography attached to some of the medieval manuscripts, which is recognized to be based on the *Life of Horace* written by the imperial biographer Suetonius at the beginning of the second century AD. These details can be supplemented by (and are often themselves based on) information in the poems themselves, a few of which come in this selection. Freedman's son: *Satires* 1.6.6, 45, 46; Venusia: *Satires* 2.1.35; farm, schooling, *coactor*: *Satires* 1.6.71–82; Athens, Philippi, return to Rome: *Epistles* **2.2.43–52**, pp. 166–7; *scriba*: *Satires* **2.6.36–7**, p. 44; introduction to Maecenas: *Satires* 1.6.54–62; Sabine estate: *Epistles* 1.16.1–16; *Carmen Saeculare* and its effect on Horace's reputation, *Odes* 4.3.16–24.

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Horace's earliest published writings are the *Epodes*[3] and the two books of *Satires*, all of which seem to have appeared by 30 BC. During the 20s he was working on the first three books of lyric odes, probably published in 23. These seem not to have found great public favour, and perhaps because of this he turned his attention to a development of the *Satires* in the form of verse epistles, one book of which was published in 20 or 19. In 17 he was asked by the emperor to compose the hymn very publicly sung in celebration of the Secular Games, Augustus' great festival of national rededication. This seems to have directed rather more sympathetic public attention to his lyric poems generally, and a year or two later he accepted Augustus' commission to write a fourth book of *Odes*. Not long after this, at Augustus' personal request, he wrote him a substantial epistle dealing with literary topics. There are also two other long epistles concerned with literature, one perhaps written about 20 BC, one (the *Art of Poetry*) perhaps ten years later.

Maecenas appears somewhat less conspicuously in Horace's latest writings, but there is little doubt that their friendship continued until Maecenas' death in 8 BC, which was followed by Horace's own death on 28 November of the same year.

Rome in the age of Augustus

This short account of Horace's career has largely ignored the fact that the time until 30 BC was one of catastrophic troubles for the Roman state, in fact for the whole Mediterranean world. From 91 onwards there was intermittent conflict in Italy. In 49 this became full-scale civil war. There were relatively peaceful interludes, but it is not unreasonable to count eight separate outbreaks of civil war before the final conflict. The climax of this was Octavian's great naval victory at Actium over Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, 2 September 31 BC. Antony and Cleopatra fled to Alexandria, where they committed suicide in 30. The period 50–30 was described by the later historian Tacitus (*Annals* 3.28.2) as one where neither law nor moral principle carried any weight.

When Octavian returned to Italy in 29 BC he had decisively defeated all identifiable opposition. This did not in itself make him immediately welcome to everyone. Fifty years earlier Sulla, returning from Greece and defeating his enemies, had celebrated that victory with the mass-murder of his opponents. Nor did it mean that opposition was permanently overcome. Fifteen years earlier Julius Caesar had returned victorious from Spain, only to be murdered himself within six months. It certainly did not mean that there was automatic acceptance of Octavian as a permanently established sole ruler. In considering what title to have himself awarded, Octavian is said to have considered 'Romulus' as a possibility, but to have rejected it on the grounds that one story of Romulus' death was that he had been murdered by senators.

3 The significance of this and of the other names given to the types of poetry written by Horace is discussed at appropriate places in the text which follows.

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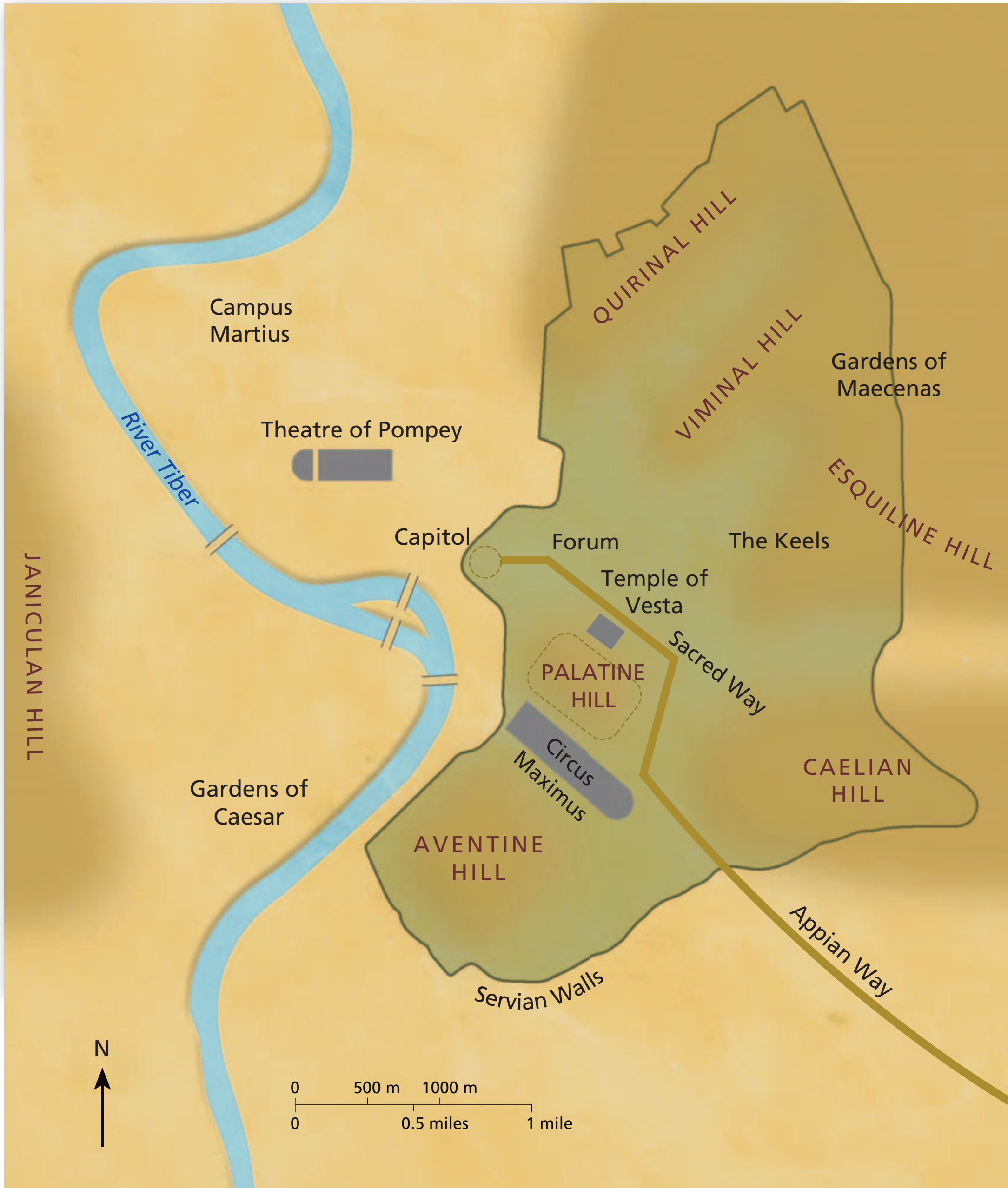

Rome as Horace knew it.

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In fact Octavian proceeded with great caution. He was determined not to be another Sulla, and took trouble to advertise his 'clemency' towards his former enemies. He took careful steps to make his power legitimate while not curtailing it. This was the delicate process of framing it within previously existing legislation which is often called 'The Restoration of the Republic'. It was not a straightforward process, but involved a great deal of experimentation and alteration. At the very moment when it was declared that the old laws were once more valid, in January 27 BC, Octavian was given the title of 'Augustus', a complete innovation. The title carried the idea of qualities reserved for the gods, already suggesting that its holder was more than just a citizen among citizens.

Under the previous arrangement ('the Republic'), Rome had been ruled by annually elected officials, of whom the most prestigious were the two consuls. These elections were strongly, often violently, contested. Elections continued under Augustus, and for at least the first ten years continued to attract fierce partisanship, though fortunately for Augustus some of the fiercest was that of his own supporters wanting to elect him consul against his wishes. But on at least two occasions, in 23 and in 19 BC, activity by disaffected opponents was dangerous enough for those opponents to be executed.

In 20 BC Augustus was in the East engaged in negotiation with the Parthian king which resulted in the return of legionary standards lost by the Romans in campaigns in 53 and 36. When he returned to Rome in 19, he treated this success, in effect, as a military victory. (Words and imagery used at this time suggest 'the conquest of Parthia'.) Only now does he seem to have regarded his efforts to establish a new order as having reached some definite conclusion. It is clear that his ambition had always been not merely to bring to Rome peace and the rule of law, but also to begin a process of social and moral regeneration. There seem to have been tentative efforts in this direction in the years immediately following Actium, but they came to nothing. Now, in 18, he put through a series of laws designed to regulate marriage, increase the birth rate and formalize a 'proper' hierarchy of social order. This done, he celebrated the renewal of Rome with the Secular Games of 17 BC.

The following years of Augustus' long reign had their difficulties and their successes, but for the most part these occurred after Horace's death. In the last book of *Odes*, we do hear something of one of the most important of these problems: how would Rome be ruled after Augustus? The emperor was determined to establish a dynasty. His earliest efforts had come to nothing when his nephew Marcellus, recently married to his daughter Julia, died in 23 BC. His wife Livia had two sons of her own, Tiberius and Drusus. These young men were put in charge of the armies which in 15 BC brought the Alpine regions under Roman control. Horace celebrates these victories in terms which speak of Tiberius and Drusus as if they were Augustus' direct family and potential successors. Horace did not live to see the many twists which this story took before Tiberius did in fact succeed Augustus in AD 14.

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The literary background

Horace wrote in a combined Greek and Latin literary tradition with which he expected his audience to be familiar.[4] He draws on Homer, the lyric and iambic poets of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, the tragedians and comic poets of Athens, and some of the writers of the vast literature of the post-classical and Hellenistic periods. In Latin he has read the epics and dramatic works of Livius Andronicus, Naevius and Ennius, the comedies of Plautus, Terence and Caecilius, the tragedies of Accius and Pacuvius, the satires of Lucilius, and recent poets such as Calvus and Catullus. He does not have much good to say about most of his Latin predecessors. He acknowledges a great debt to Lucilius (see p. 17 and p. 20n) as his forerunner in satirical verse, but Lucilius and the rest are scolded for their careless and hasty writing and lack of critical standards. He expresses general admiration for Greek literature ('keep turning over your Greek models by day and by night', *Ars Poetica* 268–9), and he is especially respectful of Alcaeus, Sappho and Pindar as models for lyric poetry, of Archilochus and Hipponax for 'iambics', and in general for Homer. He says little about the Greek literature of recent times, and he only mentions in passing one of the most important influences on him and on Virgil, the third-century Alexandrian poet Callimachus (*Epistles* 2.2.100).

Callimachus wrote in reaction against what he regarded as the self-indulgent conventionality of his contemporaries. 'It is not mine to thunder, but Zeus''(*Aetia* 20); 'Poet, make fat the animal you sacrifice, but make your Muse slender' (23–4); 'Go not by the roads made flat by wagon wheels, and do not drive your chariot along the tracks made by others' (25–6); 'Everything available to the public disgusts me' (*Epigram* 30.4); 'Big book, big mischief' (Fragment 359). His inventiveness, his very precise technique and his expressed contempt for popular approval all appealed to Horace.

Horace was also familiar with the world of philosophy, which he tells us he had studied in his time at Athens. The two world-views most in vogue at the time, about which educated people in general could be expected to know at least enough to conduct a conversation over dinner, were those of the Stoics and Epicureans. It is the ethical aspect of these philosophies which figures most in Horace.

Stoicism went back to the teaching of Zeno of Citium (335–263 BC) and his follower Chrysippus (*c.*280–207 BC). As it appears in Roman literature, the philosophy lays great stress on the idea of moral virtue: virtue leads to happiness, only the wise man can be virtuous, only the virtuous man is wise. Unless directly conducive to virtue, everything else is either indifferent or evil.

4 Many of the names in the following lines appear in the text and notes, but for a brief introduction to each, see *OCD*. Given that much the greater part of this literature has been lost, we have to accept that many of the references made by Horace are simply inaccessible to us. Fortunately this does not invalidate the poems.

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The world is governed by laws which are collectively identified with Fate and a divine Providence. Such an outlook, by which the wise man pursues a course of action undeterred and undistracted by other people and other things, had a strong appeal to some Roman aristocrats. Marcus Brutus' last words, as he died at Philippi ('O wretched Virtue, you were but a word. I followed you, but you were Fortune's slave' – Dio 47.49.2), were said to have been a lament for the failure of Stoic virtue to bring about the realization of his own ideals, and there is an element of Stoicism in Horace's expression of Augustan ideas and references to Augustus himself.

Epicurus (341–270 BC), the founder of the other school, taught that happiness is defined by pleasure. Pleasure consists in the state of having one's desires fulfilled. If therefore one can limit the nature and extent of desire, pleasure can be more reliably achieved. Merely physical pleasures are unreliable, because in achieving them one must always fear losing them, so that pleasure is not secure. The ideal state is 'being untroubled' (*ataraxia*). To achieve this state, it is necessary to recognize that everything in the universe, including the gods, is a temporary combination of atoms.[5] The gods, if they exist, exist in a world remote from ours, neither troubling it nor troubled by it. There is therefore no need for fear of the hereafter. Epicureans tended to separate themselves from the world and live in communities which re-created the original community of Epicurus, 'The Garden'. A famous maxim of the school was 'Live unnoticed'.

Several other views are identifiable. The ancient school of Plato, the Academy, in its later years preached a systematic scepticism, a 'suspension of judgement'. The followers of Plato's pupil Aristotle, 'Peripatetics', were particularly identified with the idea of avoidance of extremes, the 'golden mean'.[6] Diogenes was the original Cynic ('doggish') sage: he and his followers attempted to live according to nature, rejecting all systems and all societies as unnatural. Plato, his older contemporary, called him 'the mad Socrates'. Horace himself was influenced by the sermons ('diatribes') of the generally cynical Bion of Borysthenes.

All these attitudes can be taken to extremes and made the subject of mockery. Readers of Horace quickly realize that he is an adept at this. If he has a philosophy of his own, it is one which is influenced by philosophical teaching but not in thrall to it (see *Epistles* **1.1.13–15**, p. 150). If there is one influence which can be detected more than another, it is that of the Stoic Panaetius, who spent some time in Rome in the second century BC and did much to spread Stoic ideas among the Roman nobility. His was a Stoicism adapted to the requirements of ordinary life. His

5 This doctrine is expressed with tremendous force and vividness by Lucretius in his great poem *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*), especially Book 3. Horace knew this poem well.

6 *Aurea mediocritas.* Gold is the extreme of brilliance and value, which makes the phrase an oxymoron: 'Extreme moderation'.

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views are reflected closely in Cicero's work *On Duties*, which Horace clearly read and incorporated in several passages of the *Epistles.* But Horace likes to present himself as lurching from high Stoicism at one moment to the most degraded form of pleasure-seeking at another and, while giving thoughtful, rational, untechnical advice to a friend, to lead us to see himself as 'one from Epicurus' herd: a glossy pig' (*Epistles* **1.1.16–18,** p. 150 and **1.4.15–16**, p. 152).

Translations and imitations

Horace has been translated and imitated as much as, and perhaps more than, any other poet. To allow space for translations by other poets in this book would simply reduce the space available for Horace himself. But many of these Horatian poems are easily accessible. The best known of them are the translations and imitations of *Satires*, *Epistles* and the *Art of Poetry* by Dryden, Pope and Swift. But many others from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries have tried their hand at these poems of Horace: Ben Jonson and William Cowper; lesser-known names such as Philip Francis, Francis Howes, John Conington from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Really successful translations of the *Odes* are rarer. Demanding metres, compressed ideas and a genius for expressing high thought in plain speech tend to lead the translator into triviality, wordiness or leaden literalness.[7] Milton's famous version of *Odes* 1.5 is only partly successful. Samuel Johnson's *Odes* 1.22 and 4.7 are worthy of their author. The scholar Richard Porson succeeds with *Odes* 1.27. A. E. Housman's version of his favourite *Odes* 4.7 is a fine poem in its own right. James Michie's 1963 collection contains many excellent versions, among them 1.20 and 3.10. Then there are those who have adapted rather than translated. Allan Ramsay's Scottish versions seem to prepare the way for Robert Burns. John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, produced a spirited adaptation of *Odes* 1.22, C. H. Sisson a sardonic version of the *Carmen Saeculare*, and 'Horace, Odes Book V' by Kipling is well worth reading. It would be hard to do better than Byron's *Hints from Horace*, a re-presentation of the *Art of Poetry*. But readers will make their own judgements, undeterred by these opinions, favourable or otherwise.

7 Into all of these traps the present translator knows himself only too likely to stumble.

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1 The poet on the attack: *Epodes* and *Satires*

The published work of Horace's early years appears in one book of *Epodes* and two books of *Satires*. It is likely that *Satires* 1 was the first collection to be published, in 35 BC (Brown, p. 3). *Satires* 2 and the *Epodes* seem both to have appeared after the battle of Actium in September 31 BC. (Two of the *Epodes* refer to the battle, and *Satires* **2.6** (pp. 42–9) is set during the time when Maecenas was in charge in Rome after the battle.)

Epodes

'Epode' is our word, dating from the Middle Ages, for a verse form which Horace called '**iambics**'. He claimed to be the first (*Epistles* 1.19.23–5) to write Latin poems in imitation of the sixth-century Greek iambic poet Archilochus of Paros. The word 'iambic' is said to be derived from a word meaning 'to hurl (a missile)', and the word is used by both Catullus (36.5) and Horace (*Odes* 1.16.1–4) of deliberately insulting poems. Archilochus wrote poems at the expense of Lycambes and his daughter Neobule. Apparently Lycambes had promised Neobule to Archilochus and gone back on his word. By his poems, Archilochus, it was said, drove the two to suicide. Horace claims that he will follow Archilochus in rhythm and spirit but 'not in subject-matter nor the words which had harassed Lycambes' (*Epistles* 1.19.25).

There is one poem in the collection which appears to attack a named individual. Epode 10 prays that one Maevius may suffer a horrible death by shipwreck. It seems to be closely modelled on a poem of similar theme by **Hipponax of Ephesus**. No historical 'Maevius' has been identified. Epode 4

iambics almost all traditional English poetry is basically iambic in metre, i.e. unstressed syllable alternating with stressed syllable, unstressed first: 'He léft it déad, and wíth its héad / He wént galúmphing báck.' Lacking as we do the great variety of different standard metres which the Greeks had and Horace introduced to Latin, we do not easily understand that a particular metre is appropriate for one sort of subject-matter and not for another. But you would not rewrite *Paradise Lost* in limericks.

Hipponax of Ephesus (sixth century BC) another model for Horace's iambics. Epode 6 contains the name Bupalus, the equivalent in Hipponax' verse of Lycambes. More recent, and unmentioned, was Callimachus (see Introduction, p. 6).

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is written at the expense of an unidentified freedman promoted to military tribune. (It has been suggested that in this poem Horace puts into the mouth of an enemy the insults which were often directed at himself.) Epode 6 is an invitation to his enemies to attack him and thereby justify him in retaliation (compare *Satires* 2.1.46). Epode 5 is a long plea by a small boy to two witches, that they should refrain from murdering him as part of their effort to make a love-potion; 12 is a rant against a girl who has abandoned Horace. Epode 2 is a poem of praise to country life which in the last four lines turns out to be uttered by a banker who has no intention of changing his lifestyle.

Epode 9 is printed after *Ode* **1.37**, p. 83.

Epode 3

Horace has eaten some garlic and is feeling very much the worse for it. The setting is established by 'these greens' (7) and 'the horrid meal' (8). It is a dinner party. From line 20 it seems that Maecenas was there. At this point we see that the poem is in fact addressed to Maecenas, who seems to have noticed that the garlic has not agreed with Horace and to be teasing him about it.

Whoever with wicked hand once broke
his father's aged neck – let *him*
eat garlic, **poison worse than any hemlock** –
aah, reapers, with your guts of steel!
What venom rages here beneath my diaphragm? 5

*Jason and the 'yet unbroken bull' (*Epode *3.11)*

poison worse than any hemlock the traditional punishment for killing one's father was to be sewn into a sack and drowned. Hemlock was a standard method of execution in classical Athens, famous for its victim Socrates, but it also figures as an instrument of murder in *Satires* 2.1.56.

aah, reapers reapers eat garlic for lunch on a very hot day in Virgil, *Eclogues* 2.10–11. They are at the bottom of the social scale: their insides can presumably cope with anything. Horace cannot, and groans with the discomfort.

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