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978-1-107-43771-5 - Translations from Horace, Juvenal and Montaigne:
With Two Imaginary Conversations

R. C. Trevelyan

Excerpt

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FOUR SATIRES OF HORACE

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SATIRE I, 6. NON QUIA, MAECENAS

Though none is of nobler ancestry than you,
Maecenas, of all those whose Lydian sires
Once colonized Etruscan lands; and though
You have had forbears on your mother's side
And on your father's, who in days of old
Commanded mighty legions; for all that
Never do you, like most men, curl your lip
In scorn of those whose origin is unknown,
Such as myself, who am a freedman's son.

You say it matters not, so he himself
Be free-born, what a man's parentage may be,
Because you are honestly convinced of this,
That long before the reign of Tullius,¹
The low-born king, there had been many men
Who, sprung from unknown lineage, yet often
Lived upright lives and honourably filled
High public offices; whereas Laevinus,
A scion of that Valerius by whom
Tarquin the Proud was driven from his throne
A fugitive, was never valued higher
Than a single penny's worth; and well you know
What the judge who so rated him was like—
That People, who in its folly often gives
Honours to the unworthy, who is enslaved
Stupidly to mere fame, and gapes in awe
At inscriptions and busts.² What should *we* do
Who deem ourselves so far above the crowd?

For let us grant the people would prefer
To entrust office to a Laevinus rather
Than to an unknown Decius,³ while an Appius
As censor would remove me from the Senate
If I were not a free-born father's son—

10

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¹ Servius Tullius, sixth king of Rome, was said to have been a slave's son.

² Waxen portraits of ancestors.

³ A plebeian consul, who sacrificed himself heroically in the Latin war (340 B.C.).

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HORACE SATIRE I. 6

Well, I should have deserved it, since I failed
 To rest content in my own humble skin.
 But the truth is, Vainglory drags fast-bound
 To her refulgent car the unknown, no less
 Than the well-born. What did it profit you,
 Tillius, to reassume the purple stripe¹
 And become tribune? You are assailed by envy,
 Which, were you a private citizen, had been less.
 For soon as a man's so crazy as to bind
 The black thongs half-way up his leg and drop
 The broad stripe down his breast, at once he hears:
 "Who may this fellow be? What is his father?"
 If some one suffered from the same disease 30
 As Barrus, and should long to be thought handsome,
 Wherever he might go he'd make the girls
 Eager to question about details—what
 His face was like, his ankle, his foot, his teeth,
 His hair: and just so he who promises
 To take charge of his fellow-citizens
 And of the city, of the empire too,
 Of Italy and the temples of the gods,
 Compels the whole world to concern itself
 And to ask who his father was, and whether
 He is dishonoured through an unknown mother.
 "Do you, the son of a Syrus, of a Dama,
 Or of a Dionysius,² dare to fling
 Citizens from the Rock,³ or hand them over
 To Cadmus?" "But my colleague Novius 40
 Sits a whole row behind me;⁴ for he now
 Is what my father was once." "Do you therefore
 Fancy yourself a Paulus or Messalla?⁵
 Why, if three funerals and two hundred carts

¹ The broad purple stripe on the tunic, and a peculiar shoe, were marks of the senatorial order.

² Names of slaves.

³ The Tarpeian Rock. Cadmus was a public executioner.

⁴ The Senators sat in the orchestra of the theatre, the Knights in the next fourteen rows behind them.

⁵ Ancient noble families.

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NON QUIA, MAECENAS

5

Enter the forum all at once, this Novius
Will bellow loud enough to drown the horns
And trumpets. That at least needs impress us.”

I return now to myself, “the freedman’s son,”
Whom as the “freedman’s son” everyone carps at—
Today because I am your familiar friend,
Maecenas, but in other days because

As tribune I commanded a Roman legion.¹
This case and that are different; for although
With good right anyone might have envied me
My office then, yet not our friendship now;

50

And the less so that you have been so careful
To choose the worthy, those alone who stand
Aloof from servile flattery. Fortunate
I could not call myself, as having gained
Your friendship by some chance. It was indeed
No accident that threw you in my way;
But long ago Virgil, that best of men,
And later Varius,² told you what I was.

When first I came before you, some few words
I faltered out, for tongue-tied modesty
Would not allow me to say more. My tale
Was not that I was son to a famous father,
Nor that I owned country estates, round which
I rode on my Saturian³ horse: I told you
Just what I was. You, as your custom is,

60

Say little in reply; and I withdraw:
Then, nine months later, you send for me again
And bid me join the circle of your friends.
I count it a great honour that I pleased
One who, like you, discerns between the base
And the honest man, not by a father’s fame,
But by his own pure heart and blameless life.

And yet, if the flaws are but slight and few
That mar my nature, otherwise so sound
(Just as you might find moles that here and there
Spotted a comely body), and if no one

¹ Horace had been a military tribune in the army of Brutus.² A famous poet, and a friend of Virgil.³ Tarentine.

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HORACE SATIRE I. 6

Can justly lay avarice to my charge,
 Or meanness or debauchery; if my life
 (Forgive me such self-praise) is free from stain
 And guilt; moreover, if I have friends who love me; 70
 For all these things I have to thank my father,
 Who, though a poor man with a starveling farm,
 Would not consent to send me to the school
 Of Flavius, to which big boys, the sons
 Of big centurions used to go, with satchel
 And tablets over the left shoulder slung,
 Each carrying his eight asses every Ides;
 No, but he had the hardihood to take
 His boy away to Rome, there to be taught
 Those studies, any knight and senator
 Would have his own sons taught. If anyone
 Had chanced to notice amid that great throng
 How I was dressed, and what a train of slaves
 Followed me, he would have thought that such expense 80
 Must be derived out of ancestral wealth.
 He himself, most trustworthy of guardians,
 Accompanied me daily to all my teachers.
 Need I say more? He kept me chaste (and that
 Is the first grace of virtue), safe not only
 From every deed of shame, but from all scandal.
 He had no fear of being blamed for this
 As waste of money, if I one day should follow
 Some small trade, as an auctioneer, or else
 As tax-collector like himself. Nor then
 Should I have made complaint; but, as it is,
 For this I owe him the more praise and thanks.
 For such a father I could not feel ashamed
 While in my senses; therefore I will never
 Defend myself as many would, who say 90
 It is no fault of theirs if they had parents
 Who neither were free-born nor known to fame.
 Far different from such thoughts is what I say
 And think. For if, after a given age,
 Nature should bid us relive our past lives,
 And choose, to suit our pride, whatever parents

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NON QUIA, MAECENAS

7

Each might prefer; satisfied with my own,
 I should have no desire to adopt folk
 Ennobled by the rods and ivory chairs,¹
 Mad in the world's judgement, but sane perhaps
 In yours, if I refused a load of trouble
 Such as I never had been used to bear.
 For at once I should have to enlarge my income, 100
 To give and to receive more calls, to take
 One or another in my company
 So as never to go out of doors or visit
 My country house alone. Then I should have
 To keep more grooms and horses, and to travel
 With a whole train of wagons. As things are,
 I may, if I so choose, ride the whole way
 To Tarentum on my unpretending mule,
 His shoulders by the heavy wallet galled,
 His withers by the rider. None will taunt me
 With stinginess, as they do you, Tillius,
 When, praetor though you be, only five slaves
 Along the road to Tibur follow you,
 Carrying a close-stool and a wine-basket.
 In this, as in a thousand ways beside, 110
 I live in greater comfort than you do,
 Illustrious senator. Whenever fancy
 Leads me, I saunter forth alone; I ask
 The price of greens and meal; often I stroll
 About the cheating Circus, or the Forum
 When evening falls; beside the fortune-tellers
 I stand and listen; then betake myself
 Home to my dish of leeks and peas and fritters.
 My supper is served by three boys, and a white
 Stone-slab supports two wine-cups with a ladle.
 By them are standing a cheap salt-cellar,
 A cruet and saucer of Campanian ware.
 To bed I go at last, without a thought
 Troubling me that tomorrow I must rise
 At dawn and hurry past poor Marsyas,² 120

¹ The insignia of consuls and other magistrates.² The statue of the Satyr Marsyas in the Forum. The Novii were usurers.

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HORACE SATIRE I. 6

Whose gesture seems to declare he can't endure
 The face of the youngest of the Novii.
 I lie abed till ten; then take a stroll;
 Or else, when I have read or written something
 To please my fancy in a quiet mood,
 I anoint myself with oil, not such as that
 With which the filthy Natta rubs himself
 Stealing it from the lamps. But when I am tired,
 And now the fiercer sun warns me it's time
 To seek refreshment at the baths, I quit
 The Campus and the ball-game we were playing.
 After a frugal luncheon, just enough
 To avoid my going on an empty stomach
 The whole day long, I take my ease at home.
 Such is the life of those who have escaped
 The miseries of ambition, and its burdens.
 And so I find much comfort in the thought
 That I shall live more happily in this way
 Than if my grandfather had been a quaestor,¹
 Aye, and my father and my uncle too.

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SATIRE I, 9. IBAM FORTE VIA SACRA

I chanced once to be sauntering along the Sacred Way,
 Wholly intent, as is my wont, on working out some trifle;
 When there runs up to me a man whom I just knew by name,
 Seizes me by the hand and cries, "How are you, my dear friend?"
 "Pretty well, as things go," I answer. "I hope all's well with you."
 As he keeps dogging me, I break in with "Nothing else?" "Yes", says he,
 "I want you to know me. I'm a man of letters." "Indeed!" say I.
 "All the more pleased to have met you." Dreadfully eager to escape,
 I now quicken my pace, at times stop short, in my slave's ear
 Whisper something, I know not what, while the sweat trickles down 10
 To my very ankles. "Ah Bolanus," to myself I muttered,
 "Happy man with that temper of yours!" while about heaven knows what
 He chattered on, praising the streets, the town. When I refused

¹ The lowest of the public offices.

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IBAM FORTE VIA SACRA

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To answer him, "You're sadly anxious to be gone," said he;
 "I've long seen that. But it's no use. You'll not get rid of me.
 I mean to escort you to your journey's end." "But there's no need
 To drag you round. I wish to visit a sick friend you don't know,
 Who lives near Caesar's gardens, a long way across the Tiber."
 "I've nothing to do, and I want a walk. I'll go with you all the way."
 I drop my ears down like a sulky donkey, when his back 20
 Receives a load too heavy for his liking. He begins:
 "Unless I'm much mistaken, not Viscus, no, nor Varius
 Will make you a more valued friend. For who is there can write
 More verses or more rapidly than I can? Who can dance
 More gracefully? My singing even Hermogenes might envy."
 Here came a chance to interrupt. "Have you a mother, Sir,
 Or kindred to take care of you?" "Not one. I have laid them all
 To rest." Ah blessed souls! thought I. It will be my turn now.
 Despatch me! for that dismal fate draws near, that in my boyhood
 A Sabine crone foretold me, shaking her witch's urn. 30
 "This lad shall no dire poison, no foeman's sword cut off,
 No pleurisy nor coughing fit, nor paralysing gout:
 A chatterer shall be his death some day. Loquacious men,
 If he is wise, let him avoid, if ever he reaches manhood."
 We had come to Vesta's temple,¹ a fourth part of the day
 Being now past; and as it chanced, he was then bound to appear
 To answer bail in court, or if he failed, to lose his suit.
 "For friendship's sake," says he, "stand by me a moment." "But confound
 [me
 If I've the power to do so, or know anything of the law.
 And I must hurry, you know where." "Which am I to do?" says he. 40
 "Leave you, or leave my suit?" "Me, please." "No, that I can't," he says;
 And on he goes. I, since it's hard to fight with a conqueror,
 What can I do but follow? "How stands Maecenas with you?"
 He resumes. "There's a man of sense, careful in choosing friends.
 No one ever made cleverer use of Fortune. You might have
 A strong ally, one who would act whatever part you gave him,
 If only you'd introduce me. Why, I'm damned, if you'd not find
 You had cleared every rival from your path." "We don't live there
 On such terms as you think. No house is purer or more free

¹ Vesta's temple was in the Forum. The time would be about nine o'clock.

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HORACE SATIRE I. 9

From evils of that kind. I tell you, it doesn't hurt me at all 50
That someone's richer or more learned than myself. Each knows
His own place." "That's a strange tale, scarce credible." "And yet
So it is." "You but fan the flame of my desire to win
His friendship." "You need only wish it. A valiant man like you
Will storm the fort. He knows he can be won: that's why he makes
So difficult the first approaches." "I'll not fail myself.
I'll bribe his slaves. If I'm shut out today, I'll not give up.
I'll watch my opportunity, meet with him in the streets,
Act as his escort. There's no boon life grants to mortal men
Without great toil."

While thus he's going on, whom should we meet 60
But Fuscus Aristius, a dear friend of mine, who knew the man
Only too well? We halt. "Where do you come from? Where are you going?"
We ask and answer. I begin to pinch and squeeze his arms,
That seem to have no feeling; I nod, grimace, and wink,
Beseeching him to save me. The cruel joker smiles
Pretending not to understand. My bile within me boils.
"Surely you said you'd something about which you wished to talk
In private with me." "I remember well; but we must find
Some better time for talking. Today's the thirtieth Sabbath.
Would you affront the circumcised?" "I've no religious scruples." 70
"Yes, but I have; I'm somewhat less strong-minded—one of the many.
You'll pardon me. We'll talk some other time." Did ever sun
So black as this shine on me! The rogue makes off and leaves me
Under the knife. Just then it chanced the plaintiff came that way.
Seeing his man, "Where are you going, you scoundrel?" he bawls out;
And to me, "May I call you as a witness?" I of course
Offer my ear.¹ Off to the court he drags him. They both shout:
Crowds rush together. Thus did Apollo bear me from the fray.

SATIRE II, 3. SI RARO SCRIBIS

Damasippus. If you write seldom, so that not four times
In a whole year perhaps you call for parchment,
And then unweave the web of all you have written,
And are indignant with yourself because,

¹ When a bystander consented to become a witness, he allowed the prosecutor to touch the tip of his ear.