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FREDERICK AUGUSTUS TODD
Professor of Latin in the
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# On Reading a Horatian Satire

## AN INTERPRETATION OF *SERMONES II 6*

C. O. Brink
KENNEDY PROFESSOR OF LATIN
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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# ON READING A HORATIAN SATIRE

PROFESSOR TODD was on the staff of the Department of Latin from 1903 to 1944—41 years, for nearly half of which he presided over its affairs. His high scholarly standards and his devotion to the cause of Classics in this University impose an obligation on any Todd Memorial Lecturer which it is not easy to discharge. I am grateful for the honour of this invitation.

In the last half-century or so, when Professor Todd here fostered the classical tradition, a new manner of looking at literature has grown up, and now stands in full vigour. This manner is not only independent of the classical tradition, but owes its very existence to a different set of judgements, or prejudices. These were developed in converse with literatures in living languages. Whatever metaphors are now employed, to describe the poetic process, the 'form' or 'style' of a poem will be felt to be inseparably interwoven with its 'subject'. This is far away from the ancient kind of poetry, which talked about man and the world in pre-existing genres and in styles suitable to those genres, so that originality lay in enlivening a traditional form.

The question then arises: do we rightly continue to read ancient poetry as many used to, on the basis of the ancient literary tradition? If we do, can we hope to respond to ancient poetry with personal vigour and subtlety? But if we do not, and approach ancient poetry with our, that is, modern, assumptions, do we not introduce a strange and unrelated note into the Graeco-Roman poetic world?

Horatian satire is a case in point. How are we to read that kind of verse? It is not often satire—or what we commonly mean by the word. Is it poetry? Horace occasionally says not,

yet strenuously practises it; some modern readers say it is. What does Horace mean to do with it? What can we do with it?

* * *

Let us use, as a test case, one of the best, perhaps the best, of these poems, the 6th of the Second Book of the *Satires*—*Hoc erat in uotis*.

It begins with Horace speaking apparently in one of his most intimate and self-revealing moods. He has been praying for a farm—not too large, with a garden, a spring of ever-flowing water by the house, and a small piece of woodland.[1] 'Small' is the keynote—*non ita magnus* and *paulum siluae*.[2] Horace did not crave much. And not craving much he earned contentment when he was given what he prayed for, and a little more. Apparently the gods did that for him, *auctius atque/di melius fecere*[3] is the answer to the former prayer, *hoc erat in uotis*. The god in particular responsible is, not unreasonably, the god of gain and good luck, Mercury, whom he then addresses, *Maia nate*.[4] Mercury, however, people do not normally pray to when they want sufficiency; they pray to him when they want as much as possible: this additional corner of land and that pot of money. Not so the farmer-poet Horace. His new prayer is, Mercury, make fat the flocks and other possessions that I have but keep my mind lean.[5]

This, it seems, is protesting too much. The mood of contentment—*bene est*[6]—is that of a real person. But then, in front of our very eyes, Horace turns himself into a philosophical case—the wise man, content with little. Having been put on

1. Horace, *Sermones*, ii.6. 1-3. 2. *Loc. cit.* 1 and 3. 3. *Loc. cit.* 3-4.
4. *Loc. cit.* 5.
5. *Loc. cit.* 14-15. Virgil, *Ecl.* 6. 4-5, said *pastorem, Tityre, pinguis/pascere oportet ouis, deductum dicere carmen*. He adapted a Callimachean conceit, *Aetia* 1, fr. 1. 23-4 (cf. R. Pfeiffer's note). Horace seems to have given a further twist to the Virgilian passage although, doubtless, he remembered Callimachus as well.
6 *Loc. cit.* 4.





our guard, perhaps we want to know: how literally may we take Horace the farmer, the countryman?

'So (he goes on) having withdrawn from the city to my hilly stronghold, what should I rather celebrate in the prose poetry of satire? Here neither sordid jostling for position upsets me' nor the evil climate of the city.[7] So the passage closes and we expect to hear the praises of the country sung by the countryman—something of the order of what the poet's ancient commentator, Porphyrion, naively found in this satire: the poet 'praises the country and displays its freedom from care', *laudat rus et securitatem eius exponit*. But that is precisely what we do not hear. Instead a different person appears on the stage—Horace the townsman. He sings no praises. The serene and sincere note of contentment has faded out. A racy realism takes its place—a satire on life in the city, with Horace as its butt. Mercury too is gone; the presiding godhead is the Father of the early morning, *Matutinus Pater*, or Janus, the god of beginnings.[8]

For Janus stirs him out of the house in the early morning to act as a surety: 'up with you'—*heia*—get a move on, make sure that no one meets the call of duty before you, *officio . . . respondeat*.[9] And so, whatever the weather—'the outing is inescapable', *ire necesse est*.[10] Then the declaration, which may harm him financially, in the streets the battle with the crowds, to shove and be shoved, and to listen to angry protests, 'you would push anything out of your way and think of no one else when you are hurrying back to Maecenas'.[11] Here then is the name which is at the bottom of it all, Maecenas. The person thus accosting him maliciously implies that when Horace is in a hurry it is because he is on his way back to his patron. The poet does not seem to mind the innuendo. Indeed he deliberately says: *hoc iuuat et melli est, non mentiar*, 'to be honest, this is pleasing and sweet as honey'.[12] But he pays for his pleasure. The closer he gets to the great man's house, the

7. *Loc. cit.* 16-19. 8. *Loc. cit.* 20. 9. *Loc. cit.* 23-4.
10. *Loc. cit.* 26. 11. *Loc. cit.* 30-1. 12. *Loc. cit.* 32.

more *aliena negotia*, 'other people's affairs', press in on him.[13] A law suit, a discussion by the guild of clerks, *scribae*, to which he still seems to have belonged; a request for an urgent sealing by Maecenas: such are the obstacles on the way.

It is only when one reads on that one begins to realize that even this honeyed pleasure is not honey unmixed. For so far from taking us to Maecenas' house, he becomes autobiographical. Horace has been a member of Maecenas' circle for nearly eight years; but what do they discuss when they drive out together? The hour of the day, sport, the weather. What does he get in return? Envy all round for being in on secrets of state; requests for information that he has not got; incredulity when he has to plead ignorance.[14]

No wonder, then, the country comes back into view. Yet what was a prayer realized at the outset—*hoc erat in uotis*, the poem began, and *bene est*—is now, when he recalls it, nostalgia. 'So this day is wasted in wretchedness, not without a prayer'—*non sine uotis*[15] recalling the first verse, *hoc erat in uotis*—, 'o country when shall I see you?' *o rus, quando ego te aspiciam?*[16] The country, his books, sleep and leisure, a forgetting of a life of troubles—all this is now a wish unfulfilled: he has it, yet he has it not.

It is here that the last part of the poem begins. A vision of the peace of the country appears to a troubled townsman; civilization yearns for simplicity; busy meddling yearns for simple-mindedness. This note of yearning is beautifully resolved in the fairy-tale atmosphere that now supervenes—a state of bliss in which human personality is at one with itself. 'O divine nights and dinners', *o noctes cenaeque deum.*[17] It is country fare, sparingly eaten; drinks large or small offered as one may like; the setting is Horace's own home, *ante Larem proprium* (not other people's houses), and the diners are 'he and his', *ipse meique* (not the people he must meet in Rome).[18] What matters is conversation, *ergo sermo oritur*; the subject, not the

13. *Loc. cit.* 33. 14. *Loc. cit.* 40-58. 15. *Loc. cit.* 59.
16. *Loc. cit.* 60. 17. *Loc. cit.* 65. 18. *Loc. cit.* 60-70.





talk of busybodies concerning house property and the style of ballet stars, but 'what concerns us more nearly' and ignorance of which is harmful, *malum est.*[19] And then there follow the kinds of topic which Graeco-Roman moral theory liked to discuss. Does happiness rest on wealth or goodness? Does friendship rest on expediency or morality? What is the highest good?[20] This sort of talk could be ponderous and utterly out of keeping with the rest of the poem. It is a measure of Horace's art that few things sound more natural than these seminars on moral philosophy at the poet's *cenae deum*. Perhaps no device could be more successful than that adopted by him. He places an animal fable at the end, told with great dramatic vigour and such relish and attention to detail that one forgets its length—nearly 40 verses, one third of the satire.[21] If moral theory can put up with a fable, then the theory obviously fits a true conversation; Horace is not after all conducting seminars. The teller of the tale serves the same purpose. He is one Cervius, a rustic neighbour of the poet, who would not be likely to attend a seminar.

Cervius prattles away between whiles telling stories that suit the case, *anilis/ex re fabellas.*[22] How they are *ex re* can be seen at once. One of the guests has expressed admiration for a wealthy man, Arellius, without being aware of the anxieties wealth causes.[23] So this is a living example of the topic, 'is human happiness caused by wealth or goodness?'[24] The fable of the town mouse and the country mouse is a cautionary tale; Horace's art is flexible enough to accommodate such a tale along with subjects on a very different level of sophistication. It is simple as all fables are. The country mouse is persuaded by its friend to accompany him to the city, where he is offered a civilized dinner in civilized surroundings. Suddenly a terrible banging of doors and a barking of large hounds send them tumbling. The country man, or mouse (he is just *rusticus*), speaks the epilogue, 'This sort of life I have no use for—and so

19. *Loc. cit.* 70-3. 20. *Loc. cit.* 73-6. 21. *Loc. cit.* 79-117.
22. *Loc. cit.* 77-8. 23. *Loc. cit.* 78-9. 24. *Loc. cit.* 73-4.

farewell', *haud mihi vita est opus hac, ait, et ualeas*; 'my wood and hole will console me with simple vetch, safe as it is from ambushes'—*tutus ab insidiis*. The tale seems unsophisticated but its use in the poem is not.

What does the poem add up to? If the question is so put, the answer must be, 'nothing'. A poem does not add up to anything that can be stated as a sum total in conceptual terms. In this regard a poem is like a piece of music—it evolves in time, as a time sequence. You 'have' the poem if you follow it as it evolves, although you may look back on it from various points of vantage; and no Horatian poem can be understood if the reader does not keep looking back from unexpected points of vantage.

What strikes me first is, how complex that seeming unity really is, and how full of contradictions—a true picture of human motivation. First take Horace the countryman. The feeling of contentment, *bene est*, at the beginning, is quite genuine. And we may even condone, because Horace condones it humorously, that he has now become the model of a contented sage. But the reader is pulled up sharply when the solemn introduction does not lead to a praise of the country, but instead there appears Horace the townsman. Moreover life in Rome is not all obnoxious. The antithesis that is offered is not town v. country, or not only that. For it has escaped no attentive reader that Horace likes life in Rome, however irritating some of its corollaries. The setting is highly artificial and selective. Maecenas was not the only person in Rome whose company Horace enjoyed, although, for reasons that will soon appear, the poem is tied to the person of his friend and patron. Nor does Horace hint only at friends. Shouldering his way through the crowds he is told angrily, 'you would push anything out of your way and think of no one else when you are hurrying back to Maecenas'.[25] He remarks, *hoc iuuat et melli est, non mentiar*;[26] and commentators cannot make up their minds whether this means, 'I enjoy hurrying back to

25. *Loc. cit.* 30–1.

26. *Loc. cit.* 32.





Maecenas' or 'I enjoy being recognized as the great man's friend'. I find the latter harder to believe than the former. In any case, it is hard to overlook the pleasure implied in the close contact with Maecenas, which generates so much envy, and the palpable irony that prompts the specimens of his talk with his friend. If these two had nothing to talk about but the hour of day, the weather, and sport, Horace would not have been Horace, and Maecenas would hardly have been Maecenas.

I believe then that the black and white antithesis, city-country, is convincing only on the surface. Horace is a townsman and his love for the country is that of a townsman.[27] To make this real Horace had to make real what detains and, in a sense, pleases him in his life in Rome. Otherwise the picture would have been unconvincing. To make it a poetic portrait he has set a central piece, 'Horace the townsman', in a sharply contrasted framework, 'Horace the countryman'. If the poem only consisted of the *bene est* of the beginning and the *cenae deum* of the end, the countryman would not have been a man of mind, taste, and civilization. It is the central piece, with its 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand', which lends sense and verisimilitude to the *cena* at the end. And conversely this explains why Horace breaks off after his introduction although we expect him there to begin his praise of the country. Horace the countryman starts the poem; the townsman takes over; and the countryman ends it—only he has changed some of his features.

Horace had a sense of the different values inherent in town and country, and felt the pull of each. He got poetic capital out of the antithesis in different ways. In the 2nd Epode he does it by a simple *coup*. A person undefined celebrates for 66 verses the innocent and carefree ways of country life—*beatus ille qui procul negotiis*[28]—, but the poet discloses in the last

27. P. Lejay, *Oeuvres d'Horace, Satires*, p. 521, says, 'L'amour d'Horace pour la nature est un goût du citadin: la tranquillité, le silence, la liberté, la liberté surtout, sont les biens', &c.

28. *Epodes*, 2. 1.

four that the speaker is the financier Alfius, on the verge of a large financial operation. The 10th Epistle of the first book is a confrontation of an *urbis amator* with the *ruris amator*, Horace; the 14th a humorous dialectic comparison between Horace, who longs for the country, and his bailiff, who longs for Rome. The fault lies in their minds which cannot escape from themselves, *in culpa est animus qui se non effugit umquam.*[29] Similar antitheses are found in other poems. In our poem both the contrary aspects are aspects of Horace's mind. In the satire following ours in Book ii the poet caricatures this by allowing one of his slaves to list this among his master's many faults—'at Rome you wish for the country; in the country, in your fickleness, you praise the distant city to the skies'.[30] It shows the stature of our poem that it accommodates the two aspects without caricature and commonplace.

There is another contradiction, both logical and psychological, which Horace exploits for poetic purposes—I mean his indebtedness to Maecenas. Commentators have always taken it for granted that this satire is a tactful and delicate way of expressing the poet's thanks to his patron for the gift of the Sabine farm. Now in a sense it is—to anyone who happens to know the identity of the donor. For Horace does not here so much as allude to it; the donor, so far as it goes, is Mercury. The recipient does not allow himself even the hint of one of the *Odes* in Book ii, 'I importune the gods for nothing beyond this, nor do I crave more from my powerful friend; the wealth of *one* Sabine farm is sufficient'.[31]

This reticence however enables him to be frank in a different way. For I should have thought the poem makes it quite clear that, since Maecenas was the donor, Horace is indebted to him not only for his countryman's existence but also for his townsman's existence, which is as much the basis as it is the

29. *Epist.* i.14. 13.

30. *Serm.* ii.7. 28-9; nor does Horace's liking for simple country fare escape scrutiny in the following verses.

31. *Carm.* ii.18. 11-14.





negation of the other. Indeed if one took him at his word, he should have been full of longing for the unknown and unattached existence which he led in Rome before he became a member of Maecenas' circle. But that would be a literal and flat-footed reading. The 6th satire of Book i puts it beyond doubt that to be unattached was part of the good life to Horace's mind; this coloured his view of his life in the city at an earlier period when he was poor and unknown, just as it now colours his view of life in the country. To Horace the man these strains and stresses may have been an occasional embarrassment. To Horace the poet they offered a chance, which he took, of adding a new complexity to his poetry. Perhaps it will be seen now that if other reasons had not debarred him from addressing to the donor a poem of thanks for the Sabine farm, motives of workmanship might have done so. Otherwise he could not have written the poem as we have it.

No better name than 'moral dialectic' occurs to me for the way in which the poet has shaped his material. It is not the dialectic of the philosophers, yet it is a strongly rational principle. Two pairs of logical opposites or contradictions are made to serve this purpose. One pair is dominant, the other is subordinate. The dominant pair is Horace the countryman: Horace the townsman. The countryman provides the framework: Horace begins with the country, and returns to it in a circle at the end. The city forms the centre of the poem, surrounded by its antithesis. The subordinate pair is Horace's indebtedness to Maecenas for his countryman's existence and Horace's indebtedness to Maecenas for his townsman's existence—the former only implied, as we have seen, but so forcibly implied that no one to my knowledge has ever doubted it; the latter explicit.

I have said that Horace's moral dialectic is not that of the philosophers. Yet it is closer to it than to autobiography. There are people who take Horace literally, and think that he tells us something about his person. They are mistaken. He only

*seems* to talk about Horace the individual. For, as we have seen, the traits which he discloses are so selective, so sharply overstated or typified, that in fact we learn very little about himself, though we may learn something about ourselves and the world, if we wish to. While his voice remains unmistakable, his person disappears behind his poetry, and changes from poem to poem. He knows how to make himself into a plurality of egos, a series of contrasting types, and he holds those contrasts in a humorous-ironic balance. This apparent autobiography has a purpose. Horace has a great measure of impersonality and a dramatic gift. He is neither a townsman nor a countryman nor his patron's man nor a courtier nor a lover; he is, in his best work, a poet using typical human attitudes to feel, understand, control the poetic complexity of life. He who seeks in poetry the force of *one* single attitude, *one* powerful emotion, will not find this poet his poet.

In the present poem the complex of motifs, and of ways of expressing them, is fairly large. Let us see how it is controlled by that moral positioning which I have described.

Our satire has a pretty large measure of realism both in description and conversation. It purports to make poetry out of life as it is lived and out of the motives of those that live it. Its style mirrors that purpose. The tempo of city life is fast and this account of it gives the same impression of breathless haste which the poet maintains it gives him. It is a remarkable feat of craftsmanship that the stately hexameter verse can be so speeded up without losing its rhythmic pattern. Horace is snatched away on financial business as soon as he leaves his house. He has to shoulder his way through the crowds. He is overwhelmed by chores pressing in on him from all sides. He cannot escape urgent calls from the many who believe that he has access to all the state secrets.

Conversation too matches for rapidity and variability the talk of Roman comedy. Yet it is beautifully adapted to what the hexameter line can take. 'Up with you, get a move on, make sure that no one meets the call of duty before you',





*heia, /ne prior officio quisquam respondeat, urge.*[32] 'What's on your mind, you lunatic, what are you trying to do?', *quid tibi uis, insane, et quam rem agis?*[33] ' "Get Maecenas, if you please, to put his seal on these papers." If one answers, "I'll try", he adds, "if you will you can", and insists,' *'imprimat his, cura, Maecenas signa tabellis.' / dixeris, 'experiar'; 'si uis potes', addit et instat.*[34] Polite dialogue is no less flexible, as the passage on state secrets demonstrates amusingly.

The party at the Sabine farm has the same life-likeness. But its tempo and character are just the opposite. Now all is leisurely and happy and homely, down to the dinner of beans, 'the relations of Pythagoras',[35] and 'the tender garden greens well dressed with fat bacon', *uncta satis pingui . . . holuscula lardo.*[36] The feeling of contentment, of freedom to attend to the things that really matter, is caught so well that the conjunction of sophisticated moral theory—'the nature of goodness and its highest form'—with the animal fable, contributed by the rustic neighbour, seems the most natural thing in the world.

The fable itself—a masterpiece of dramatic narrative—repeats in the small world of animals what has previously been performed on the larger, human, stage. It clinches the matter with a moral, the country mouse saying, 'I have no use for that sort of life; so farewell'.[37] Horace's flexibility is such that the moral may clinch the matter of the narrative but does not settle the poet's 'case'. For *he* is not saying good-bye to all that, to live in safety ever thereafter.

Yet the same realistic style can rise without strain to considerable seriousness and intensity. I do not mean the mock-heroic highlights, which now and again add a touch of parody to the narrative. I mean such a thing as the prayer that opens the poem. 'This was the burden of my prayer', *hoc erat in uotis.*

32. *Serm.* ii.6. 23-4.
33. *Loc. cit.* 29, *quam rem* Bentley for *quas res* MSS.
34. *Loc. cit.* 38-9.
35. *Loc. cit.* 63.
36. *Loc. cit.* 64.
37. *Loc. cit.* 115-16.

'More and better the gods have done. It is well. No greater thing I ask, Son of Maia; only make these gifts last', *auctius atque/di melius fecere. bene est. nil amplius oro,/Maia nate, nisi ut propria haec mihi munera faxis.*[38]

The whole fabric of the poem is shot with this personal skein. But its colour is ever-changing. At the outset it is the poet's contentment. Then a rapid and surprising change—an emotion mixed of dissatisfaction and pleasure with what after all is inseparably tied to his good fortune: city life. And we understand why he makes us return with him to an even more intense feeling of relief in the final part of the poem—happiness with what is simple and right. This he finds in the country and in the sanity of its people, who are as far removed from the discontents of civilization as Horace is not. The rustic neighbour thus becomes an ideal figure and the animal fable an *exemplum* of moral choice.

Wordsworth in his letter to Christopher North demanded that poets should look out of themselves to men 'who lead the simplest lives, and those most according to nature; men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criticisms', etc. Generally, he notes, we associate with 'gentlemen, persons of fortune, professional men, ladies'. 'Few descend lower, among cottages and fields, and among children.'[39] The conclusion of our satire seems to suggest that Horace's *Sabinum* pointed the same moral. But it also suggests that Wordsworth took his cultural primitivism more literally than Horace would have done. Horace is not what Shelley called Wordsworth, 'a solemn man'. There is admiration but also an affectionate smile on Horace's features when he talks of the country. Although neighbour Cervius' tale is the note on which the poem closes, it is introduced by the significant words, 'he prattles away,

38. *Loc. cit.* 3–5.

39. Letter to John Wilson ('Christopher North'), *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt (1935), p. 295.





telling stories that suit the case', *garrit anilis/ex re fabellas.*[40] Both these things are true for the maker of this satire—the stories and their suitability to the case.

Here then is a poet who, in the same poem, takes for his province widely separated fields of experience and reality. In his best work (to which the present one belongs) he can make us view them as separate and united. Diversity is perhaps the first impression on reading a Horatian poem. There are the sharp edges, the abrupt changes of matter and mood, which remind one of some of the poetry written in our century. Of these changes the present poem offers some notable examples. The variability of tone, the complexity of his motifs even in shortish poems, make their reading a bracing and exhilarating experience.

But, just as strongly marked, there is an overall unity. That is what I called the ironic balance which Horace strikes between the contradictory claims that are made on him—a moral and rational problem turned into a poetic. The *Hoc erat in uotis* is an outstanding personal poem in which a few simple dialectic contradictions are used to keep a grip on a complex picture of reality. It would be foolish to generalize on the narrow base of one poem; but I can at any rate appeal to readers of Horace when I say that, though outstanding, this is not an unusual instance of this poet's art.

Now as long as you read this ancient satire like any modern poem (as we have done so far) you can be in no doubt as to its virtues. They lie in its personal character, its variable tone and matter, and the multiplicity of its patterns in spite of an unmistakable unity. In that sense it is poetry of a high order. But then, you have been reading it with modern spectacles, as though Horace has been writing for us. In historical perspective—poetry in Latin written by a Roman for Roman readers—it looks a different thing. How different does it look? Clearly, there are certain differences. The most important of them is this. According to the poet himself—and his contem-

40. *Serm.* ii.6. 77–8.

poraries would have agreed with him—these poems, which we call satires, and the manuscripts, with a Horatian term, *sermones*, 'talks'—these poems are not really poetry. To him the genre is *satura* or *saturae* and *musa pedestris*, 'pedestrian verse'. So he says in the very poem we have been considering: 'what should I rather celebrate in the prose poetry of satire?', *quid prius illustrem saturis musaque pedestri?*[41] Here are echoes still of that earlier satire that grudged the name of poet to anyone writing, as Horace does himself, things that are closer to talk (or prose), *neque si qui scribat uti nos/sermoni propiora, putes hunc esse poetam.*[42] So some had said of comedy. Its metre apart, it is mere prose, *nisi quod pede certo/differt sermoni, sermo merus.*[43] What makes poetry is the eagerness of spirit and the force informing subject and diction.[44] Regularize rhythm and word order of satire, and you are left with prose; treat true poetry in the same manner, and you are left with the limbs of a poet, even though dismembered, *etiam disiecti membra poetae.*[45]

There are other indications of the same kind. Hence some critics have convinced themselves that Horace was not really much of a poet when he wrote satire. That assessment has a blunt edge. It leaves unexplained what it is meant to explain—the kind of poetry the satires are. It leaves unexplained too what Horace can possibly have in mind when he criticizes Lucilius, the archaic satirist, for his faulty workmanship;[46] when he makes astringent poetic demands for the writing of the New Satire;[47] and when all his life he publishes *sermones* that are worked to those demands.

How can this misunderstanding arise? What I think has happened is this. In retreating to Roman thought about Roman poetry we are retreating to a different intellectual climate, a climate of fixities, genres, and predetermined forms. When Horace is both apologetic and demanding about the poetic

41. *Loc. cit.* 17. 42. *Serm.* i.4. 41–2. 43. *Loc. cit.* 47–8.
44. *Loc. cit.* 46–7. 45. *Loc. cit.* 62. 46. *Serm.* i.4 and 10.
47. *Serm.* i.10.5 ff., 40 ff., 72 ff.





quality of his satires he is (in a sense) contradicting himself. He uses a language—the language of Graeco-Roman literary criticism—which had been developed to explain a different kind of poetry. The ancients had no critical vocabulary for describing verse that breaks through the limits of poetic forms thought to be fixed by nature. A poetic entity at varying levels of intensity and tone and not enshrined in the conventions of epic, drama, and lyric, is beyond their critical purview. Hence both of Horace's contentions are true, up to a point: satire is not poetry (like epic, drama, and lyric); yet satire demands the most astringent poetic workmanship if its blend of seriousness and gaiety is to succeed, and if the variety that ranges from poetic force to that of urbane humour and understatement is not to fall to pieces. Here is a large source of misunderstanding for the modern mind which is used to artistic representation without fixed and pre-established forms and genres. But the misunderstanding goes deeper. Scholars take Horace's ironies just literally enough to spring to his defence although they know all about ancient literary genres and although no one will charge them with lack of sensitivity to Roman poetry, or this poet's humour. Thus according to Professor Fraenkel, whose book has set a new scholarly standard in these studies, Horace remains a poet 'even in his *sermo pedester*' or he likes to disguise the change from one section of a *sermo* to another 'because there are not, or ought not to be, any sections in the talk of educated men of good manners'.[48] No, Horace's 'pedestrian Muse' *is* a form of poetry, as Professor Fraenkel himself has demonstrated so often and so well; and the poet disguises certain breaks between sections because a Horatian *sermo* stems from a unity of conception, and is not just adroitly fitted together of sections imitating the talk of educated men of good manners.

I will mention just one instance of this device. Expressing his gratitude for the farm in the first fifteen verses, the poet talks as if he were a countryman in the country, praising rural

48. E. Fraenkel, *Horace*, pp. 143, 393.

seclusion. Now, he adds, neither *ambitio* worries him, nor the climate of the city. But, as the reader realizes with a shock, what in fact follows is not praise of the country at all but dispraise of Rome. Thus the word 'city' is the turning point, and may be claimed as a 'concealed transition' from one 'section' to another. Yet it would be facile to regard these as two diverse paragraphs, riveted together by a third which may belong to either. Paragraphing is a useful reading aid in Horace. But these divisions are not the logical stages of conceptual prose, more or less strongly emphasized. The overall unity of this poem consists in a humorous balance of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, of country and town—a picture, I suggested, of human motivation. That unity is first hinted at in our passage, which links country and town, but cannot be fully perceived until its counterpart, a reverse transition from town to country, provides the indispensable clue.[49]

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Listening to the claims and deprecations that Horace makes when he talks about his satires, what is our reaction? Satire is humorous. It is concerned with truth and morality. It has a multiplicity of style and tone—yes, all this may be agreed. It is not poetry—that surely is implausible. All Horace does in fact is to express the unusual variability of these poems in the nomenclature of his time, however ironically. Only by a strenuous intellectual effort can we enter into that way of thinking and the effort is well worth making. But I doubt if the teaching, unlike the manner, of Horace's literary criticism is the best way of understanding Horace the poet. At best these pronouncements help us to understand some of his preconceptions.

All his *sermones* have passages in what might be named a 'middle' or 'ordinary style', itself a fusion of poetic and conversational elements. It is very flexible and casual. By a slight rise it can reach considerable intensity and seriousness.

49. *Serm.* ii.6.59 ff.





By a slight fall it easily reaches conversation, moral argument, and story-telling. Horace had predecessors using this poetic genre between genres. But no one before him seems to have grappled with the problem of how to make *sermo* the vehicle of serious poetry and how to infuse unity into this seemingly diverse world. That was a creative problem of the first order. In his best *sermones*—whether satire or epistle—he solved it in a manner which combined a maximum of diversity with a maximum of unity. This is the mainspring of his art and no imitation so long as the Horatian tradition persisted in European literature has ever achieved it again. All we can do is to sense it and describe it.

The *Hoc erat* is one of the finest examples of this manner and I have tried to describe it in two different ways. First we have read it as one might read a modern poem, not trying to make the historical adjustment to which classical scholars are accustomed. This I believe has certain advantages: the poem is allowed to speak without the distortions to which, as we have seen, ancient theory would subject it. Yet in projecting the *Hoc erat* to the contemporary screen we have distorted it in our own way. The only remedy for that is to do what we did in the second place, see it historically and remember why Horace and his contemporaries were dubious as to the poetic stature of a satire or poetic epistle. The two procedures are complementary. To treat them so, will help those of us concerned with the ancient literatures, and those concerned with the modern, to question our assumptions as well as theirs.