

3.15°

You've heard!? The trip and weight are off! I'm free!
 Now Rome will host my birthday jubilee!
 Cheers to my birthday! Let no one neglect it,
 which came when you, I think, did not expect it.

3.16°

How nice, Cerinthus, that you feel so free
 in everything you do concerning me,
 not worrying I'll make a grave mistake!
 Yes, chase that bit of skirt, you dashing rake,
 that whore in hand-me-downs, that quaint go-getter,
 before Sulpicia, Servius's daughter.^o
 Yet some have got the worry in their head –
 they care for us, and are discomfited –
 that I will yield my place to a base bed.^o

3.17°

Cerinthus, are you worried for me now,
 thanks to my achy limbs and feverish brow?
 I'd only wish to see this illness through
 alive if I believed you wished me to.
 What good can good health do if you can learn
 that I'm near death with utter unconcern?

3.18°

Never again may I so feed your blaze
 of worry, love, as in the last few days,
 for never in my wayward youth did I
 do anything I'm so embarrassed by
 as when, last night, pretending to ignore you,
 I left – as if I wasn't burning for you!

Horace

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (8 December 65–27 November 8 BCE) was Rome's greatest lyric poet; he is also the poet in this volume who tells us most about his life. He was born in Venusia (now Venosa), in Apulia in the heart of southern Italy. His freedman father was an auctioneer who provided credit to his buyers and then reaped the interest; his job paid for his son's education in Rome and Athens. There, in 44 BCE, Horace met Marcus Junius Brutus – then fresh from assassinating Julius Caesar – and joined the Republican cause. After Brutus and his fellow tyrannicide Gaius Cassius Longinus were defeated at the Battle of Philippi in Macedonia in 42, Horace, who had fought on the losing side, returned to Rome. He was pardoned, but whatever inheritance he had from his father was confiscated; poverty, he claims, then drove him to poetry. Soon enough he caught the notice of Tibullus' (pp. 411–20) patron Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, as well as of the poet Virgil (pp. 398–410), who introduced him to Augustus' friend and confidant Gaius Cilnius Maecenas (see the introduction to Latin Lyric, p. 369). In 17, Maecenas officially became Horace's patron and gifted him his beloved villa and estate in the Sabine Hills northeast of Rome, sometime after the first book of his *Satires* was published in 35/4.

Horace may have been present at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, when the fleets of Antony and Cleopatra were finally defeated by Octavian, who thus united the Roman east and west under his rule as *princeps* (First Citizen). Thereafter, perhaps around 30, Horace published his second book of *Satires* and his *Epodes* (satirical poems written in mostly iambic lines of varying length, which, like Callimachus (pp. 113–81), Horace called *iambi*). The first three books of *Odes* were published as a unit in 23. Thereupon Horace turned to his *Epistles*, of which Book 1 may have come out around 19 and Book 2 around 11/10, about the same time as the fourth book of *Odes*. The highlight of Horace's career was being commissioned by Augustus to write the hymn for the Centennial or 'Secular' Games in 17 BCE (see the

introduction to Latin Lyric, p. 372); this may have gotten him back into writing lyric, if he had not been doing so all along. In any event, during the last decade of his life he seems to have distanced himself somewhat from Maecenas and inched closer to Augustus – though Maecenas, on his deathbed, asked Augustus to ‘remember Horace as if he were me’. When he died in 8 BCE, Horace was buried near Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. In his will, he left all his possessions to the *princeps*.

Horace’s relationship to contemporary or ‘modern’ poetry was complex. Unlike Callimachus and Propertius (pp. 421–45), Horace pointedly refrains from advertising his Alexandrianism. And yet Alexandria was essential to Horace’s modernity: anyone who ignored Callimachus would have seemed somewhat like a Georgian sonneteer in the time of T. S. Eliot. Horace was too ambitious for that; besides, Callimachus – by way of the New Poets (see the introduction to Latin Lyric, pp. 367–8) – had taught everyone that the best poetry was highly polished, that slight and elegant was preferable to grand and clumsy. And Horace agreed: hence his Callimachean criticism of his forebear, the satirist Gaius Lucilius, whose writing was ‘rough’ and whose eloquence was a ‘muddy’ stream which abundantly coughed up all manner of verbiage (‘two hundred lines an hour!’), including plenty which would have been better left out. The Callimachean reflex is perceptible in the *Odes* as well, where again and again Horace protests the essential modesty of his art – for example, in Ode 1.6 (p. 466), where he refuses to write a grand epic in praise of the *princeps*’ right-hand man, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, instead preferring to hymn epic battles of flirtation between men and women at dinner parties.

Yet, for all that Horace shared Callimachus’ basic project (at least in its broad outlines), still he had no desire to be yet another Callimachus reborn – that was Propertius’ schtick. To carve his own niche, Horace looked farther back – as Alexandria itself had done – to Paros and Lesbos, the wellsprings of iambus and lyric. Horace availed himself of the Callimachean (we might call it the ‘Poundian’) paradox that the most modern poetry could be made by imitating the most ancient. Catullus (pp. 373–97) had shown that the meters of Lesbos were possible in Latin; it fell to Horace to solve the double problem, technical and tonal, of how to produce them consistently and elegantly in a manner consonant with the Augustan age.

Horace wished to maintain both a poetic and an individual identity, separate from the regime; yet he also valued his creature comforts, and lacked any interest in the kind of integrity that led to a Cato’s or a Brutus’ demise. His poetic solution was thus a personal one as well. The lightness of lyric as a genre, along with frequent protestations of his own slender powers, allowed him to compliment Augustus without constantly writing hymns of adulation. Lyric gave license to his overarching focus on themes of wine, love, philosophy (mostly Epicurean) and the inevitability of death, while his deferential, slightly clownish persona was able to draw laughs, often at his own expense, and soften hard words with the emollient of wit. Could any other poet have refused Augustus’ invitation to be the *princeps*’ personal secretary without giving offense? Horace did; while, at the same time, his choice of Alcaeus (pp. 55–67) as model allowed him to rise to the grandeur of Augustan political themes when he chose.

Yet Horace was no double agent. After fifty years of civil war, no one in Italy wanted more bloodshed, and Horace – self-serving, but principled, too – was a true friend of the regime. Augustus’ absolutism was the price Rome paid for peace, and Horace was Augustus’ good-natured, easy-living, self-deprecating, subtly savvy and razor-sharp court poet. He was also, it seems, quite personally close to his patrons, first to Maecenas, and then later to Augustus himself. No doubt many of the personal nuances of Horatian tact – his feel for how a line or image would land with a particular person, the care with which he calibrated his messages, his sense of when to approach the seat of power and when to keep his distance – will have vanished with his addressees. And yet when, for example, Horace celebrates his reunion with a friend from Brutus’ army without offending his pro-Caesarian patrons (Ode 2.7, p. 472), or when he addresses a high-minded, philosophical ode to the disfavored Licinius Murena (Ode 2.10, p. 473), whom he manages to warn without incurring any disfavor himself – in all such cases, the odes themselves preserve a fossil record, as it were, of his delicate negotiation between past and present, artistry and authority. If, today, the poems feel so lapidary and inevitable that it’s hard to imagine a time when they did not exist, it is testimony both to the superb skill and precision with which Horace weighed his words, and to his enduring influence, impossible to overstate, on English and European poetry.

Odes

I.1°

Maecenas, lordly scion sprung from Etruscan kings,
 o patron and protection, my glory and delight,
 some people love the dust-clouds kicked up at Olympia°
 that settle on the churning wheels of chariots
 grazing the turning posts, and palm leaves elevating
 winners to the exalted masters of earth and heaven.
 One man loves when the random herdlings of Romulus
 rally around him, climbing the triple rungs of office;°
 another, if he imports and hoards in his own storerooms
 10 the whole of the corn harvest threshed out of Africa.
 A third, at his happiest hoeing the family farm,
 you couldn't get to give up the fields that were his father's
 for all the wealth of Asia, to board a ship from Cyprus
 and sail on pins and needles the stormy Cyclades.
 A merchant, in a tizzy at wild siroccos wrestling°
 the Sea of Icarus, praises the lazy days°
 and fields of his hometown; soon he rebuilds his shattered
 freighter fleet, untutored to live on slender means.
 There's some who won't refuse a swig of the old Massie,°
 20 who aren't too proud to take off a bit of their busy day,
 and sprawl, now in the shadow under the green madrone,
 now by the softly bubbling source of a sacred spring,
 Still others love encampments, the horn and trumpet blaring
 their mingled calls to battle, and warfare, source of mother
 bitterest grief. The hunter forgets his sweet young wife,
 hunkering down in the blind under the sky of winter,
 no matter if it's deer his trusty pups are after,
 or if a Marsian boar has burst his woven nets.°
 Me, though, a wreath of ivy adorning my poet's brow
 30 will introduce to heaven, me in the sacred wood
 the agile choruses of nymphs and dancing satyrs°
 sequester from the commons, as long as I'm allowed

the twin pipes of Euterpe, and Polyhymnia°
 remains not loth to tender her lyre tuned in Lesbos.
 Just slip this Roman songster among the lyric Greeks –°
 my elevated noggin will knock against the stars!

I.3°

May Venus guide you as you go,°
 with help and light from Helen's starry brothers;°
 may Aeolus send one wind to blow°
 up from Calabria, and still the others,°

so that, good ship, you can repay
 the debt you owe us all. Release him whole
 and hale in Attica, I pray,
 and safeguard Virgil, who is half my soul.°

He had a heart encased in oak°
 and triple bronze, whoever first set sail°
 on the fierce sea in a frail bark
 with no fear of the hurtling southern gale°

locked with the northern, wrestling,
 or rainy stars, or how the South Wind raves,°
 the Adriatic's fitful king,
 mighty to calm, mighty to whip the waves.

What death could a man fear who looks
 unfazed upon the monsters swimming under
 the churned sea, or on your shipwreck rocks,
 Acroceraunia, o Cliff of Thunder?°

To no avail the wise god split
 the continents with the estranging sea,
 since our keels still race over it,
 unholy, sailing where they shouldn't be.

10 The sacred sheep that graze by the snowy rills
of Algidus, among holm oaks and oaks,^o
or those that roam the Alban Hills
fattened by pontiffs, will give their necks^o

to the priestly axe – that's them, but don't you worry;
such hecatombs do not pertain to you.

Some fresh-snapped myrtle or rosemary
crowning your little gods will do.

If the hand touching your altar is undefiled,
though offering no rich sacrificial props,
your grieving Lares will grow mild
20 when the salted grain gets hot and pops.

3.25^o

Bacchus, where to, now that I'm filled and flown
with you? Which groves will know my ecstasy
as I'm whirled through? Which caves intone
the deathless glory and sublimity

of Caesar, to be sown among
the stars and court of gods where Jove presides?

My song is a new star, unsung^o
by other mouths. As, on the mountainsides,

10 a sleep-starved Bacchant stares, slack-jawed,
at Hebrus and the snow-bright fields of Thrace,
or at the barbarously foot-trod
Rhodope, so shall I, in a trackless place,^o

gaze on the empty groves and rivers
and thrill with awe. King of the Naiad bands,^o
and of the Bacchants, whose strength shivers
and topples towering ash trees with bare hands,^o

mine is no ditty in humble mode,
no mortal air. This danger is delight,
Bacchus: to pursue a god,
with a green vine around my brow, snugged tight. 20

3.30^o

I've raised a monument more permanent than bronze,
loftier than the kingly decay of pyramids,^o
which not the needling raindrops nor North Wind on the rampage
can ever gnaw to nothing, no, nor the numberless
centuries in succession, nor yet the flight of time.^o
I shall not wholly perish, but most of me will go
untouched by the death goddess to wax forever fresh^o
with praise of generations. As long as the High Priest
and Vestals keeping silence still scale the Capitol,^o
I shall find voice, where vocal Aufidus pours his floods,^o 10
and where the reign of Daunus shepherds the country people
on fields bereft of water, I, mighty from slender means,^o
the first to lead in triumph Aeolia's exquisite
music to Roman rhythms. Now raise the wreath of glory^o
won by your power and mine, Melpomene, and gladly^o
consent to lay Apollo's laurel upon my head.^o

4.1^o

Venus, must I rejoin your fray^o
after so long on leave? Please, please, don't make me!
That man I was in the gracious sway
of Cinara is no more. Won't you forsake me,^o

heartless Mother of sweet desire –
me, nearly fifty, too stiff, too long inactive,
to bow to your soft yoke? Retire
to where the young men's prayers are more attractive!