

Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus)

STEPHEN J. HARRISON

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 BCE) was one of the greatest Latin poets and wrote in a variety of genres over a poetic career of some three decades. He is the author of hexameter *sermo* (relaxed/satiric verse) in *Satires* 1 (35 BCE) and 2 (30 BCE); of iambic poetry in the *Epodes* (30); lyric in *Odes* 1–3 (23); *sermo* in letter form in *Epistles* 1 (20/19); lyric again in the *Carmen saeculare* (17) and *Odes* 4 (13); and of a final phase of epistolary *sermo* in *Epistles* 2 and the *Ars poetica* (12–8). Horace was born at Venusia (Venosa) on the border of Apulia and Lucania (*Sat.* 2.1.34–5), son of a freedman who had made money as an auctioneer and small financier. Educated expensively at Rome, he then went to study in Athens (43/2), where he joined the republican forces of Brutus as an officer and fought in their defeat at Philippi (autumn 42). He then seems to have lost property in the confiscations of 41, and became a clerk of the public treasury. In 38/37, introduced by his friend VERGIL, he became attached to the circle of MAECENAS, the future Augustus' close advisor, and sometime in the 30s was given financial independence by him through the gift of a Sabine estate. In 17, he was commissioned to write the extant choral hymn the *Carmen saeculare* for public performance at the Saecular Games of Augustus, and his later works show a closer relationship with the emperor, who is the addressee of two odes in *Odes* 4 and of an epistle in *Epistles* 2.

His *Satires* follow the tradition of LUCILIUS in attacking the vices of contemporary society, though they are more measured and

humorous and less aggressive toward living individuals, which reflects Horace's poetic persona as well as his moderate social position. His *Epodes* revive Archilochean traditions of invective, often tempered by self-deflation, though their political commitment to Maecenas and the cause of the young Caesar is clear. His *Odes*, reviving the Greek lyric of SAPPHO, ALKAIOS, and (especially in book 4) PINDAR, are generally reckoned to be his greatest achievement, and attain a remarkable density of thought and expression, alongside an unparalleled perfection of poetic form. Full of celebrated poems of a symposiastic and wryly erotic cast, their grander moments are sometimes deflated by ironic humor, though they also contain seriously encomiastic support of Augustus and his policies, especially in the fourth book and in the six "Roman Odes" at the beginning of the third book. His *Epistles* show a persona committed to ethics and literary criticism and a gift for sententious expression of precepts, and in the first book an artful use of the letter form (the longer epistles of the second book are less epistolary and more like essays, and the *Ars poetica* is a tour de force as an epistle of 476 lines).

SEE ALSO: Archilochos.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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