

HORACE  
EPISTLES  
BOOK I

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# INTRODUCTION

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## 1. THE *EPISTLE* AS A LITERARY FORM

In his earlier works Horace honoured the Roman literary tradition and trod the highway of imitation. For each form he chose an exemplary model to follow. In his *Sermones* he took Lucilius for a guide (*S.* 2.1.34 *sequor hunc*), in his *Epodes* Archilochus (19.23-4n.<sup>1</sup>); the lyric *Odes* were modelled on various Greek masters, especially Alcaeus (19.32-3n.). The one element common to all these poetic kinds is the expression of a personal point of view (unlike epic and drama); in formal terms, there is usually a direct address to someone imagined as being present (even in the second book of *Sermones*, which is made up of dialogues, the poet is one of the interlocutors, except in the fifth satire). This restless exploitation of the inherited genres of personal poetry did not content Horace. At the height of his creative powers he himself became the 'discoverer' of a new verse form, the epistle. The novelty is to be seen in the synthesis of the conversational hexameter of his *Sermones* and of the more personal addresses found in the lyric odes.<sup>2</sup> Like all letters, the poetic epistle presents one half of a dialogue, since the addressee is by definition absent; the themes are chosen as being of interest to both correspondents, usually avoiding the generalized topics of the *Sermones*. Original as the *Epistles* are, they nevertheless had an ancestor in the personal letter. Its uses influenced Horace in his choice of topics and presentation.<sup>3</sup>

Personal letters duplicate many of the face-to-face verbal exchanges of daily life but also, thanks to the formality of writing, may perform them in somewhat elevated tones. Horace uses the letter to invite people to visit him or to come to a party (IV and V), to recommend one friend to the notice of another (XII), and to provide a character reference for one seeking a post (IX), all the sort of thing we still find ourselves writing. (On the other hand, there are here no love letters or

<sup>1</sup> References given in this form refer the reader to the Commentary *ad loc.* References to whole poems within the first book are in Roman numerals.

<sup>2</sup> So Campbell 257.

<sup>3</sup> See W. Allen Jr *et al.*, *C.J.* 68 (1978) 119-33.

consolations.) But the personal letter in prose had also been developed as a vehicle of instruction, above all by philosophers.<sup>4</sup> Epicurus, for instance, had used the letter to clarify his doctrine and exhort his followers; so enduring is the appeal of the personal note that these are now all that survive of his original writings. Even a philosopher's letter will be tailored to some particular and pressing need of the recipient that gives an urgency to the presentation. This comes across still in the letters of St Paul.<sup>5</sup>

There were even verse letters before Horace's.<sup>6</sup> His model for satire, Lucilius, had composed a letter to a friend who had failed to pay him a visit during an illness; it was a longish piece and occupied the fifth book of his collection. Catullus too jotted down a note to a friend (35; cf. 8.2n.) and perhaps a dinner invitation too (13); some of his poems look like dedicatory letters (65, 68A). The existence of these pieces establishes the verse epistle as a literary form distinct from those letters of every day that are actually delivered to their addressees. But Horace might still claim the distinction of having invented a new poetic genre, in that he first put together a whole collection of verse letters. It is however crucial to the understanding of his moral position at the time of writing that he regards his letters as a branch of *satura*, and so not true poems. They are rather compositions of a poetically indeterminate character, like the earlier *Sermones*.<sup>7</sup> The novelty of his undertaking has produced a special issue for academic debate, the fictionality of the letters.

It used sometimes to be held that Horace intended his letters in the first place as personal communications between himself and his ad-

<sup>4</sup> For general discussions and illustrations see K. Dziatzko, *RE* III 836-43, esp. 842; Sykutris, *RE Suppl.* IV 185-220; F. Susemihl, *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur in der Alexandrinerzeit* (Leipzig 1892) II 579-601 (forgeries); J. Schneider, *RAC* II 564-85, esp. 571 'Lehrbriefe'; H. Peter, *Der Brief in der römischen Literatur* (Leipzig 1901) esp. 181-2. For Horace in particular see W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman poets of the Augustan age: Horace and the elegiac poets* (Oxford 1891) 87-8; O. A. W. Dilke, 'Horace and the verse letter' in C. D. N. Costa (ed.), *Horace* (London and Boston 1973) 94-112.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Schneider, *RAC* II 574-6; E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa* (Leipzig and Berlin 1909) II 492-510.

<sup>6</sup> See E. H. Haight, *S.Ph.* 45 (1948) 525-40.

<sup>7</sup> See *Ep.* 2.1.111 *ipse ego, qui nullos me adfirmo scribere uersus, AP* 306 *nil scribens ipse*.

dressees.<sup>8</sup> Eduard Fraenkel, following Edmond Courbaud, stuck to this belief through thick and thin, and even XIV was in his view 'a genuine letter, spontaneously written' (311). The general weaknesses in this position were ably exposed by Gordon Williams,<sup>9</sup> though the fictional character of a number of pieces had long been accepted by some. That the whole collection was made up of 'pretend' letters was argued in a fine essay by E. P. Morris,<sup>10</sup> who put his finger on the crucial point that the *Epistles* are in essence no different from the *Odes*, or indeed from any poem which imitates reality. If Horace's verse letters were genuine and spontaneous they would cease to be imitations and, in ancient eyes, lose their status as literature. As in the *Odes* the addressee is not necessarily a convention, for the chosen theme may reflect his personal interests and preoccupations, but none of the letters is merely occasional. Even an invitation to a party (V) blossoms into larger issues that leave the guest, Torquatus, momentarily in the background.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the challenge of a new form, the letter offered Horace the chance to signalize a change of direction both in his life and in his art. Since this point is sometimes blunted, it deserves special notice here.

In the first epistle he says that he renounces 'et uersus et cetera ludicra' (10) because of advancing years and a change of heart ('non eadem est aetas, non mens' 4). The repetition *et ... et* binds *uersus* closely to *ludicra* so that Horace may once again exploit an ambiguity of contemporary literary theory, as he had done when ascribing to his *Sermones* a doubtfully poetic status.<sup>12</sup> (Comedy too seemed to some theorists insufficiently poetic, and Horace had already made it clear that he saw comedy as the remote ancestor of Lucilian satire.)<sup>13</sup> The epistles are deemed to continue the 'unpoetic' tradition of the *Sermones*, and so to mark a break with the genuine poetry of the *Odes*, celebrations of the life of pleasure which the poet now relinquishes. The fiction that the letters are not poems is sustained at *AP* 306 'nil scribens ipse'

<sup>8</sup> K. Dziatzko, *RE* III 842.54-9, with special reference to XIII and 20.5 *non ita nutritus*. He seems to have ignored the implications of 20.4 *paucis ostendi gemis*.

<sup>9</sup> *Tradition and originality in Roman poetry* (Oxford 1968) 7-24.

<sup>10</sup> *Y.C.S.* 2 (1931) 81-114.

<sup>11</sup> See Williams (n. 9) 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> See *S.* 1.4.39-40.

<sup>13</sup> See *S.* 1.4.45-6, then 1-6 and cf. *Cic. Or.* 67.

(by contrast, when Statius imitates Horace and writes a poetic epistle, *Silvae* 4.4, he draws attention to the fact that it is in verse: 'inclusa modis haec . . . uerba' (11)). Indeed this fiction decides the issue in XIII of what Vinnius is delivering to Augustus: *carmina* (17) can only refer to what men call poems and must exclude the present 'unpoetic' collection; M. L. Clarke believed that there could be no difficulty about the use of *carmina* to describe the *Epistles*.<sup>14</sup> Every difficulty, in fact.

Thus the letter, a document but conversational in tone, offers fresh strategies for dealing with old issues. The central issue remains Horace himself. This is of course appropriate to a letter; our friends want to know what we are up to. But more to the point is the Roman tradition of seeing oneself as setting an example.<sup>15</sup> One of the qualities Horace had admired in Lucilius was the exposure of a whole life in poetry (*S.* 2.1.30-4), whole in the sense that we learn from him both good and bad, we see him 'warts and all'. Clearly, Horace did not feel that he had yet done with himself as a theme and the letter offered a fresh form in which to pursue a programme of self-revelation.<sup>16</sup> The traditional situations found in lyric had not allowed him the fullest exploitation of this ever fascinating matter, but he could not simply produce a third book of satires to round out the picture of himself. Mocking vice, even in his own person, was played out; a more positive note was wanted. Moreover, his own position in Roman society was more conspicuous than ever; he was a public figure and his friendship had been sought by the greatest in the land.<sup>17</sup> He had moved high up the social ladder and of course had attracted criticism, which he sought to answer in *S.* 1.6. His approach there had been defensive, but now, endorsing his view that the poet should instruct as well as entertain, he adopts a more positive and self-confident tone. What is more surprising, indeed

<sup>14</sup> See *C.R.* 22 (1972) 157-9, esp. 158. His point that there is an apparent delay between the publication of the Odes in 23 B.C. and their (fictive) delivery to Augustus rests on the unnecessary assumption that no epistle can have a fictive date earlier than the late 20s; see §3 below.

<sup>15</sup> See R. G. Mayer, 'Roman historical *exempla* in Seneca' in P. Grimal (ed.), *Sénèque et la prose latine*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 36 (Vandoeuvres - Genève 1989) 168-9.

<sup>16</sup> As Quintus said to Marcus Cicero, 'te totum in litteris uidi' (*Fam.* 16.16.2).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *C.* 2.18.10-11 *pauperemque diues | me petit*; 4.3.22 *quod monstror digito praetereuntium*; *S.* 2.1.75-7 *me | cum magnis uixisse inuita fatebitur usque | inuidia*; 6.52 *deos* (i.e. the chief men of Rome) *quoniam propius contingas*.

so surprising that many decline to focus upon it, is that in addition to the sort of moral improvement he had encouraged in the satires Horace now defends and advises upon the life of the dependant in Roman society. The *Epistles* thus become his most essentially Roman production (just as the letter was to prove a most fertile genre in Roman hands generally). They prosecute a dual programme centred on spiritual and social self-improvement. A glance at the poet's own social rise will help to account for this unusual feature.

## 2. HORACE'S CAREER<sup>18</sup>

Horace's father was a *libertus*, a former slave who had obtained his freedom perhaps through a combination of talent and hard work. His son was born *ingenuus*, a gentleman, but of indeterminate grade. When he was of an age for serious schooling, it was clear that the local education in Venusia was inadequate, so Horace was taken to Rome for the sort of instruction a senator's son might receive despite his father's poverty (*S.* 1.6.71–82, esp. 71 *macro pauper agello*; 20.20). After Rome, Athens, where, among the sons of the nobility, for instance Cicero's own Marcus, he studied philosophy and rhetoric. From all this it is clear that Horace's father had ambitions for his son's improvement, which was not to be purely intellectual, but social as well. In fact, the two were hard to keep apart. In a city like Rome, with no institutions of higher learning and no consistent state patronage for the arts, a life dedicated to poetry and study was only possible within the ranks of the highest society. Wealth alone facilitated scholarly leisure for a Varro or an Atticus; others needed patronage. Horace, whatever his father's intended provision for his financial security, would only be able to make his way in such a society thanks to his personal address. And it is clear that his father was fitting him to take some place in that society at its higher levels. Such an ambition was honourable, in the eyes of his son and of Rome generally.

The son did not throw away his chances, though he came close to doing so through miscalculation. In 43 B.C. he joined the military staff

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion of the issues raised in this section see R. Mayer, 'Horace's *moyen de parvenir*' in S. J. Harrison (ed.), *Aere perennius: celebrations of Horace* (Oxford 1995).

of M. Brutus, who was recruiting for his campaigns against Antony, as a *tribunus militum*. Since Horace had no military training and the post was often something of a staff appointment, Brutus may have chosen Horace for his character. However that may be, this proved an essential step in his social rise, for it guaranteed his equestrian status and unimpeachable respectability.<sup>19</sup> Horace unfortunately picked the loser and after Brutus' defeat at Philippi in 42 B.C. his chances, like his fortune, took a nose-dive. Not that he was destitute; some property he lost (*Ep.* 2.2.50-1 *inopemque paterni | et laris et fundi*), but he had enough money (and presumably influential support) to buy a treasury secretaryship. This post, which there is no reason to suppose he ever relinquished, provided a fair income.<sup>20</sup> His social relations at this time are altogether obscure but he clearly moved amid the *vie mondaine* of Rome (indeed, if the *Epodes* are to be believed, he was something of a toy-boy (*Epod.* 12.2, 21-2)); it was presumably in such a milieu that he met two rising poets, Varius and Virgil. They liked him (as Brutus, perhaps, had liked him) and introduced him to Maecenas, who also came to like him very much. So much so in fact that at the very end of his life in 8 B.C. when he was hastily making a will in which to leave all of his estate to Augustus, he did not forget his poet: 'Horati Flacci ut mei esto memor'.<sup>21</sup> Through Maecenas he came to the notice of Octavian, an association not at first close, but developing to a point where the *princeps* wanted the poet for his personal secretary (a post he knew was not for him, and so declined on grounds of health<sup>22</sup>). So even the most powerful man in the world came to like the freedman's son. Something about him appealed to all of these very different men and not unreasonably he was impressed by his social rise: 'non ego, pauperum |

<sup>19</sup> See L. R. Taylor, *A.J.P.* 46 (1925) 161-70 and Rostagni's note on the Suetonian *uita* 6.

<sup>20</sup> Fraenkel 15-16 and see A. H. M. Jones, *Studies in Roman government and law* (Oxford 1960) 154 and 156 for discussion of the equestrian status of *scribae* and the purchase of the office. Both Suetonius and Porphyrio assumed that this was the implication of the scene in *S.* 2.6.36; their sense of the meaning is preferable to that of C. Ampolo, *P.P.* 39 (1984) 193-6, who believes it refers to the *collegium poetarum*.

<sup>21</sup> Suet. *uita Hor.* 17 Rostagni.

<sup>22</sup> Suet. *uita Hor.* 29 Rostagni.

sanguis parentum, non ego, quem uocas, | dilecte Maecenas, obibo' (C. 2.20.5-7). More than that, he reflected upon how he had achieved it and identified its key element in the power of pleasing: 'me primis Urbis belli placuisse domique'.<sup>23</sup> This was also the very element that made for his success in poetry too: 'quod spiro et placeo, si placeo, tuum est'.<sup>24</sup>

So once again poetry and life came into close contact for Horace, and the world of his imagination is founded upon his experience (indeed their relationship is the underlying issue in XIX). To succeed in both poetry and in society, giving pleasure counts. In the case of poetry we agree that this is so, but the social aspects of pleasing are trickier and need justification. Success owed to wealth or power or inherited social connections is easy to understand and approve (these were Roman values). But a social success owed entirely to agreeable character was perhaps a difficult concept for a Roman; it smacked of the pliancy of the Greek, suggesting a want of firmness in the character. It is therefore to just this issue that Horace addresses himself in a number of the *Epistles*. How does a man make his way in Rome by arts purely social, without (or in spite of) the adventitious attractions of money or family name? How does he keep his self-respect and confirm his independence in a society founded upon patronage? How, amid other aspirants, does he honourably distinguish himself? How, after all, does he learn when to call a halt? These issues Horace had reflected upon and the *Epistles* represent the literary mould in which his views were cast. No other poetry is so intimately bound up with the workings of Roman social life. For that reason alone Horace needed a new literary form, since the available ones, even satire, could not be used as vehicles for reflection upon the use to be made of society as it is (satire *must* criticize). Horace, an outsider whose talents and personality brought him to the very *solium Iouis* (17.34), charted the social adventure in an original poetic form. To give his inventions due plausibility he chose his addressees carefully; they are almost invariably young men of good, but not especially remarkable, family on the way up in Rome's meritocracy.

<sup>23</sup> 20.23; cf. 17.35 and S. 1.6.63 *placui tibi* (Maecenas).

<sup>24</sup> C. 4.3.24; cf. 19.2 and AP 365 *haec placuit semel, haec deciens repetita placebit*.

### 3. THE ADDRESSEES AND THE DATE OF COMPOSITION

Apart from Maecenas, to whom three letters are addressed, Horace's correspondents all appear to be young with their careers in full flood.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that there are only two aristocrats of ancient name in the whole collection, Torquatus (V) and Tiberius Claudius Nero (IX). The bulk of the rest are presumably equestrians pursuing upward mobility by attaching themselves to the eminent. Thus III abounds in the names of a budding élite, the *cohors amicorum* of Tiberius. (Even the unidentifiable Titius (3.9; some think he was a friend of Ovid's (*Pont.* 4.16.28)) and Munatius (3.31) have names suggestive of the new aristocracy.)<sup>26</sup> Septimius in IX would like to join their company. Iccius in XII has also found a good billet (not that he fully appreciates this) in the service of Agrippa, the emperor's son-in-law.

We cannot say anything certain about Albius (IV), Numicius (VI), Bullatius (XI), Vala (XV) or Scaeva (XVII). Quinctius (XVI), it has been speculated, may come from a newly prominent family.<sup>27</sup> Of course the name of Horace's bailiff (XIV) cannot be known, but even he fits the general pattern of upward mobility. He started life as a drudge in his master's town house (*mediastinus* 14.14); his aspirations to greater responsibilities and rewards were realized.<sup>28</sup> Of Julius Florus (III), to whom *Ep.* 2.2 is also written, we know only what Porphyrio tells us, namely that he was a *scriba* (8.2n.) and wrote satires.

Perhaps the most tantalizing figure is Lollius, because he receives two letters, II and XVIII, both prominently placed in the collection. It used to be assumed that he was a son of M. Lollius, consul in 21 B.C., a *nouus homo*, and the addressee of *C.* 4.9. But the arguments of E. Groag against this, founded upon no more than the tone of address in XVIII and a belief that a rich young man needs no advice on dealing

<sup>25</sup> See in general W. Allen Jr *et al.*, *S.Ph.* 67 (1970) 253-66 and F. M. A. Jones, *L.C.M.* 18 (1993) 7-11.

<sup>26</sup> L. Munatius Plancus, *cos.* 42 B.C., the addressee of *C.* 1.7, was the uncle of M. Titius, *cos.* 31 B.C.; Munatius certainly and Titius possibly had a son.

<sup>27</sup> See N-H on *C.* 2.11, p. 168 and Syme, *AA* 386.

<sup>28</sup> It would be a mistake to agree with P. Guthrie, *C.P.* 46 (1951) 116-17, that Horace blundered in promoting the man; the letter nowhere suggests that the bailiff failed to give satisfaction in his new post.

### 3. THE ADDRESSEES AND DATE OF COMPOSITION 9

with the rich, have somewhat surprisingly obtained a measure of assent;<sup>29</sup> we must, however, always be wary when the character, pursuits and social status of a recipient are to be inferred from the language.<sup>30</sup> It might have been thought that a young man of a very recently 'ennobled' family might well stand in need of guidance in negotiating the treacherous waters of high society, indeed of court life. The Lollii were rich and famous, but had no smoky busts in their entrance hall to validate their pretensions (if any). Horace's advice nowhere suggests a mercenary motive in the young man's attachment to an unnamed great person (though he prudently hints at the acceptance of worthwhile gifts (75), it hardly seems fair of Nisbet-Hubbard to call Lollius a social-climber (*Odes* 2, p. 67)). Lollius served under Augustus in Spain and is preparing himself for public life. There is no evidence that compels a belief that he is not a son or other close relation of the consul of 21 B.C. Speculation about the identity of his important friend is also tempting. Tiberius figures considerably in the collection. It may not be wholly accidental that Lollius is urged in II to learn lessons from the *Odyssey*, a poem which provided Tiberius himself with sculptural motifs for his grotto dining-room at Sperlonga.<sup>31</sup> Horace is certainly aware that the most significant patronage now flows from but one household, that of Augustus, and that Rome has in effect a monarchical court. This sense would give a special edge to his advice to Lollius, since there is a greater need than ever to preserve the old Roman virtue of independence of manner. The risks of toadying are greater where the social hierarchy rises to a point; for everyone will feel a sense of inferiority to those at the apex. This would also have a bearing on the juxtaposition of XVIII and XIX, which are related in theme. These, like many other letters, are designed to help young men negotiate the pitfalls of Roman high society.

Maecenas too deserves a word here, not that any of the three letters to him (I, VII, XIX) concentrate upon his current activities. For in 22 B.C. his friendship with Augustus was dented by the ugly and confusing

<sup>29</sup> See *RE* XIII 1387.30-42; R. Syme, *J.R.S.* 56 (1966) 59, *History in Ovid* (Oxford 1978) 185 n. 4 and *AA* 396.

<sup>30</sup> So Syme himself, *AA* 390.

<sup>31</sup> See A. F. Stewart, *J.R.S.* 67 (1977) 76-90.

conspiracy of Varro Murena.<sup>32</sup> The opening line of the whole collection is therefore the very balm of friendship to one cast down. Horace leaves no doubt about his devotion and Maecenas is alone the object of his warmest feelings (*dulcis amice*, 7.12). His interest in the rising young is keen, but his old friend, albeit now perhaps in a conceded retirement,<sup>33</sup> still has his fullest attention. There may even be a specially personal note attaching to the expression *uates tuus* (7.11). For Augustus had, as mentioned above, tried to secure Horace's service as personal secretary;<sup>34</sup> he failed, because Horace, who knew when to call a halt to ambition, declined. Thus he remained Maecenas' own poet and did not hesitate to advertise the strength of his continued attachment to the former favourite.

Since the *Epistles* imitate personal correspondence Horace naturally conformed what he says or how he says it to the interests (so far as they may be known) of his recipients. Thus, for example, the wine offered Torquatus at the party in his honour would be redolent of his family's history (5.5n.); likewise, the language in which the letter is composed parodies the legalisms he was used to as a barrister (5.14, 15, 21nn.). There may be a glance at Fuscus' profession (10.45n.) and there is certainly some pun implied in the reference to Vinnius' name (13.8-9n.).

The composition of the *Epistles* is generally reckoned to have begun shortly after the publication of the *Odes* in late 23 B.C. Epistle XIII cannot have been written very long after that. Few other letters can be dated. At the close of XX Horace refers to his age in the year 21 B.C. A number of others relate or refer to the embassy of Tiberius in the East and the recovery of the Roman standards (III, VIII, XII, XVIII); XII also refers to the success of Agrippa in Spain. These all fall in 20 B.C. No letter contains a clear reference to a later date. Thus

<sup>32</sup> See Syme, *AA* 387-9; the rift, however, may not have been so complete as Syme believed: see G. Williams, 'Did Maecenas "fall from favour"? Augustan literary patronage' in K. A. Raafaub and M. Toher (edd.), *Between Republic and Empire: interpretations of Augustus and his principate* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990) 258-75, and P. White, *C.P.* 86 (1991) 130-8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.53.2.

<sup>34</sup> Suet. *uita Hor.* 18-23 Rostagni; this is usually dated to the mid- to late 20s, but the precise date is not known.

the book is generally believed to have been published in either 20 or 19 B.C.

#### 4. POETIC STYLE

In returning to the dactylic hexameter Horace resumed what may be called the plain style, as distinct from the more elaborated manner of the lyric poems. The difference between them can be illustrated by comparing the treatment of similar themes in the two genres (as is done briefly for instance by Nisbet-Hubbard in their note to *C.* 2.7.28). Two brief examples and one more extended must suffice. Horace illustrates the inevitability of death by an appeal to historical *exempla* in a late ode thus: 'nos ubi decidimus | quo pius Aeneas, quo Tullus diues et Ancus, | puluis et umbra sumus' (*C.* 4.7.14-16), and in an epistle thus: 'cum bene notum | porticus Agrippae, uia te conspexerit Appi, | ire tamen restat Numa quo deuenit et Ancus' (6.25-7). The ode employs the pathetic anaphora of *quo* and the ornamental (but hardly superfluous) epithets, chiasmically ordered; these are absent from the epistolary style, as too is the tragic note of *puluis et umbra*.<sup>35</sup> In the epistle, on the other hand, the references to everyday localities, Agrippa's portico and the Appian way, drive home the ordinary truth of the poet's claim. Similarly at 2.47-9 he says simply and without ornament that neither *domus* nor *fundus* nor *aeris aceruus et auri* will cure a sick man; in an ode he more elaborately says that Phrygian stone, the wearing of star-bright purple, Falernian wine and Assyrian nard will not alleviate pain (3.1.41-4). The thought is the same but the manner of its presentation could not be more different in the two genres, as the third example will show.

The praise of wine's beneficial power is common to *Ep.* 1.5.16-20 and *C.* 3.21.14-20:

tu lene tormentum ingenio admoues  
plerumque duro; tu sapientium  
curas et arcanum iocoso  
consilium retegis Lyaeo;

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Soph. *El.* 1159, Eur. *Mel.* 536 N.

tu spem reducis mentibus anxiis  
uirisque et addis cornua pauperi  
post te neque iratos trementi  
regum apices neque militum arma.

Again, ornamental epithets distinguish the ode (the anaphora of *tu* should perhaps be disregarded, since it is characteristic of the hymn form into which the ode is cast, rather than of the lyric style in general). One clause is embraced by epithets of opposite sense (*lene* ) ( *duro* ), and there is an oxymoron in *lene tormentum*. Another epithet, *iratos*, is transferred from *regum* to *apices*, itself remarkably concrete. The transitive use of *trementi* is confined at this date still to poetry. The image of the horns of courage is perhaps proverbial, but no less striking for that. In the epistle five cola in asyndeton make up the sentence.<sup>36</sup> The first four limbs increase in length; the two words of the last recall the shape of the first. The language is brisk and businesslike with little concrete imagery and no ornament, unlike the ode, but contrasting words, *contracta* and *solutum*, as in the ode, enclose a line. The anaphora of *quem non* (19–20) emphasizes wine's universal efficacy; 19 refers to a new skill, 20 to the loss of a burden, both thus tied in to what has preceded.

The lyric style of course would hardly do for a letter, which is generally a plain-style document, but Horace had also to decide whether to recast his hexameter verse style after a pause of some ten years in its use. If we are to believe Porphyrio, a second- or third-century commentator, the *Epistles* differ from the *Sermones* in nothing but title; the metre, subject matter and language remain the same in his opinion.<sup>37</sup> It is useful for purposes of the following analysis to keep to his identification of topics. We do not have to hold with his opinion.<sup>38</sup> Let us begin with the hexameter itself.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. the asyndeton in the similar praise of wine at Aristoph. *Equit.* 92–4.

<sup>37</sup> The text at this point of his note seems garbled, but he clearly isolates these three points.

<sup>38</sup> The first to make an attempt to distinguish between Horace's satiric and epistolary mode was C. Morgenstern in an agreeable pamphlet, *De satirae atque epistolae Horatianae discrimine* (Leipzig 1801); he rightly drew attention to metrical differences (28–30), and to the change of tone, especially the greater involvement of the addressee in the epistle.

(i) *The hexameter*

The epistolary hexameter recalls its satiric predecessor, but with some significant differences. In the *Satires* Horace claimed to reproduce the rhythms of speech: 'sermoni propiora' (*S.* 1.4.42). To achieve this he dismantled the formal patterns that were being imposed upon the hexameter by Lucretius, Catullus and the young Virgil and recomposed the verse so as to reflect better the lively turns of phrase in spoken Latin. His model for this was Lucilius, whose hexameters are clearly suppler than those of Ennius, except when he tries to be serious and impressive. But the influence of the comedies of Terence ought to have been considerable too, for his iambic dialogue shows far greater fluidity from line to line than that of Plautus. Whatever Horace learned from his models was transformed and elaborated to a degree well beyond earlier experiments. This is most evident in his handling of a crucial part of the verse, the last two feet.

The formal hexameter of heroic and didactic epos restricted the normal pattern at the end of a line to little more than two sorts of word length. The last foot might be a word of two syllables (*includere ludo*, 1.3) or consist of two monosyllables (*omnis in hoc sum*, 1.11); it might also be the end of a three-syllable word (*dicende Camena*, 1.1). It is sometimes assumed that these patterns grew in favour because they secured exact coincidence of word accent and verse ictus and so asserted the metrical shape of the line at the close. What is more, there was a tendency either to keep units of sense enclosed within the confines of a single line or, if enjambment was employed, to terminate the clause just after the beginning of the next line (e.g., 1.54-5 *haec Ianus summus ab imo | producet*).<sup>39</sup> These were the established patterns which Horace deconstructed in his *Sermones*. The word shapes he admitted into the last two feet were very various.<sup>40</sup> More audaciously still, he employed unusual sense pauses before the end of the line in the fifth and sixth feet. Above all, he favoured beginning new clauses in the

<sup>39</sup> Winbolt §8.

<sup>40</sup> He allows five-syllable words to occupy the whole of the last two feet, as at 5.8 and 26; he specially favours the pattern found at 1.13 *quo lare tuter*, where the first word of the fifth foot is a monosyllable (cf. 32, 106, 2.51, 62, 3.6, 21, 30, 31, 4.6, 14.26, 18.88). More rarely, he ends a word in the *longum* of the fifth foot, e.g. 2.40, 56, 14.22, 16.10. See Waltz 225.

sixth foot itself, sometimes even with a final monosyllable starting the clause. These practices he continues into the *Epistles*.<sup>41</sup> Their effect is to create a deliberate inconcinnity between verse period and the run of the sentence which is bound to weaken the reader's (and above all the hearer's) sense of the traditional metrical shape of the heroic line.<sup>42</sup> This, as Horace says, keeps his satiric verses creeping along the ground, rather than soaring away.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the unusual patterns of word-length and sense pause at the end of the line, the main caesura too undergoes some alteration from the heroic norm to produce a sense of informality. The favoured rhythm had from the first been a strong caesura in the third foot. Next in preference was a strong caesura in the fourth foot following a weak (or trochaic) caesura in the third. Now these are the normal patterns in Horace too, but he was prepared to abandon them quite often to give an impression of nonchalance.<sup>44</sup> But there is a difference between the earlier and later hexameters. The *Epistles* are more strict;<sup>45</sup> the reason for this ought to be that letters, as written documents, are always more formal in presentation than speech, especially among the educated. The pen in the hand produces verbal patterns different from the loose rhythms of speech, however choice. This formality Horace aims at reproducing in his own verse letters, without the regularity of heroic epos. Thus he shows a special fondness for the weak caesura in the third foot, which he does not always support with a strong one in the fourth. This sometimes produces a rhythm avoided by Virgil, a false line end within the verse.<sup>46</sup> Horace strews just enough deviations from the norm into his letters to create a distance between the very irregular patterns found in his conversational poems on the one hand and the strictly regulated scansion of the contemporary heroic epos on the other.<sup>47</sup> Yet even the irregularities follow certain patterns. For instance, in the case of the false line ends just mentioned it is noteworthy that Horace has a clever way of evoking the norm by creating the weak caesura with *-que* or some other enclitic that might at a pinch be

<sup>41</sup> See 1.8 *ne*, 23 *quae spem*, 24 *id quod*, 36 *quae te*, 80 *uerum*, 2.33 *atqui*, 3.25 *quodsi*. There is a discussion by Brink on *Ep.* 2.1.241.

<sup>42</sup> Nilsson 151. <sup>43</sup> *Ep.* 2.1.251. <sup>44</sup> Waltz 219. <sup>45</sup> Waltz 239.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. 1.24, 2.25, 3.3, 4.12, 5.11, 7.89, 14.30, 16.42, 18.88, 19.47.

<sup>47</sup> The hexameter in Horace's lyrics is pretty carefully restricted, as is the hexameter of contemporary elegy.

regarded as separable for metrical purposes.<sup>48</sup> Horace bows in the direction of the established norm, but the epistolary hexameter goes its own way and with a kind of *sprezzatura* creates its own standard of refinement.

The move away from freedom is also found in the use of elision and of prosodical licences generally. The major differences between *Sermones* and *Epistulae* are listed by the standard authorities.<sup>49</sup> For example, short final syllables are no longer lengthened before a double consonant beginning with *s* (called sigmatism). In the *Sermones* they are also lengthened *in arsi*, an artificial practice found in the *Odes* as well, but now dropped.<sup>50</sup> In the *Epistles* there are no instances of prosodic hiatus,<sup>51</sup> of hypermetric lines, or of the correption ('shortening') of final *o* in words either of cretic or of iambic value.<sup>52</sup> Elision in general is less common and more strictly handled; for instance, elisions of a long syllable by a following short vowel are rare.<sup>53</sup> Monosyllables are less frequently elided, and this elision is confined to pronouns.<sup>54</sup> An indication of the nice refinement of the epistolary hexameter is to be found at 6.26 (quoted above, p. 11), where *Agripp(ae) et*, if correctly transmitted, would be the only instance in the collection of the elision of the diphthong *ae*; for this reason and since *et* is omitted from some MSS, the elision is felt to be inauthentic. Horace can thus be detected following the growing fashion for avoiding elision of long syllables, especially *ae*.<sup>55</sup> The trend of all these details is plain: the freedoms of the spoken word and some artificial metrical practices give way to the more strictly measured rhythms of the written language.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., 3.3, 4.12, 5.15 (not a false ending; but the prefix of the word in the fourth foot *in-* might also be felt to be metrically separable), 7.89, 16.42; Waltz 202. This particular phenomenon is also discussed by W. Meyer, *Sitzungsb. der bayer. Akad. der Wissen.* (1884) 1045-6.

<sup>49</sup> Waltz 160-80; Bo *Index*; Klingner *Index*.

<sup>50</sup> Klingner *Index* 325; Bo *Index* 88; L. on *S.* 1.4.82; N-H on *C.* 2.13.16.

<sup>51</sup> Hence Shackleton Bailey (100) was rightly hesitant in proposing to read *nam* at 15.13.

<sup>52</sup> This is not uncommon in the *Sermones*; see Klingner *Index* 325 (*nesciō quod Ep.* 2.2.35 is the sole exception).

<sup>53</sup> So at 7.24 and 18.104 (pronouns), 1.11 and 39.

<sup>54</sup> See L. on *S.* 1.1.52 and the table in E. Norden's edition of *Virg. A.* 6, p. 457.

<sup>55</sup> See Leo (1912) 357-8.

(ii) *Diction and word order*

The choice of language too is chastened in the *Epistles*. They naturally welcome *colloquial* or *conversational* idiom,<sup>56</sup> yet some words or phrases found in the *Sermones* are absent, perhaps by design. Before describing the diction of the letters in detail, it will help to explain why the term 'prosaic' is here repudiated. There are two reasons. First, prosaic now suggests not so much language specially suited to the formal style of oratory or history, but rather a use of language flat, tame or pedestrian. Secondly, the ancient terms for prosaic (πεζός, *pedestris*) chiefly referred to the absence of music and metre, not to an undistinguished level of diction. In fact, the bulk of all Latin poetry was composed with words that were on the lips of men, at any rate of men who cared to choose how they spoke or wrote (cf. *AP* 95 *et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri*).<sup>57</sup> It is fairer then to notice that some words are absent from the work of certain poets who felt them insufficiently appropriate to the matter in hand. Let the case of the adverb *eo*, meaning 'for this reason', illustrate the point.

The *Sermones* and *Epistulae* admit the word readily enough and the commentators call it prosaic (so L. on *S.* 1.1.56 and B. on *AP* 222). That description is partly justified by the word's absence from the lyrics. But on the other hand *eo* appears in the cultivated dialogue of Terence; it is what Romans actually said, and therefore appropriate to a conversational and epistolary style. The reason it is not used in the lyrics (or by Virgil and the elegists) is perhaps rather that its logical function was too precise, insufficiently suggestive; some poets scout words that give a rigorous connection to their thoughts and it is for that reason, not for any 'prosaic' quality that *eo* and words of similar sense are avoided. By the same token, some words in everyday use may have been felt to lack distinction without being flat, for instance *pecunia* (which anyway is inappropriate to the heroic societies of epos and tragedy). In the discussion that follows and in the commentary, there-

<sup>56</sup> Cicero said that the language of every day was the most appropriate to a letter (*Fam.* 9.21.1 *epistolas . . . quotidianis uerbis texere solemus*). Italicized English words henceforth direct the reader to the Index for specific examples.

<sup>57</sup> Williams (n. 9) 745 reckons that there was no lexicographical boundary in Latin between prose and poetry; for further doubts about the validity of the distinction modern scholars employ between prosaic and poetic diction see also D. T. Benediktson, *Phoenix* 31 (1977) 345-7.

fore, words and phrases will be described as colloquial rather than as prosaic.

First, then, words that do not reappear from the *Sermones*. The colloquial use of *ac* or *atque* after a comparative and *hoc* in the sense of *ideo* are not to be found in the letters.<sup>58</sup> Others which fail to reappear are *ast*, *nequeo*,<sup>59</sup> *nihilum*, *num/numquid* (introducing direct questions), *quin* and *sicut* (taken as one word). Moreover, the forms of the words allowed admission are now more restricted than in the *Sermones*. Some forms found there are either abandoned altogether or much reduced in use in the *Epistles*. Their archaic or colloquial tone may have rendered them less fit to Horace's ear for inclusion in a documentary style.<sup>60</sup> Forms that fall out of use are adjectives or adverbs compounded with *per* ('very'),<sup>61</sup> *quis* (the dative and ablative plural of the relative pronoun), the old (and literary) passive infinitive ending in *-ier*,<sup>62</sup> the syncopated forms of the perfect system, the suffixes *-n*, *-met*, and *-ne* (joined to an interrogative word), the dative *mi*. Forms of the pronoun *is* are reduced in frequency.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the by now more literary ending of the third person plural of the perfect indicative active in *-ere* becomes commoner in the *Epistles*.<sup>64</sup>

In most of his poetry Horace dealt with everyday matters. The lyric poems exploited a certain elevation of diction as appropriate to the genre, but in the hexameter poems something more in keeping with the subject matter was wanted. The challenge therefore was to distinguish his style from that of even the best conversation without sound-

<sup>58</sup> See L. on *S.* 1.1.46.      <sup>59</sup> See 12.10n. on *nescit*.

<sup>60</sup> A useful test of the tone of a word or construction is to see if it is used in a speech rather than in the narrative of the *Aeneid* or *Metamorphoses*, for both Virgil and Ovid admit usages to their speeches that are absent from the more formal narrative. For example, Virgil uses *queo* twice, but only in speeches (*A.* 6.463, 10.19).

<sup>61</sup> See B. on *AP* 349; in fact they are unusual as early as the second book of *Sermones*, where only *perarō* is found at 5.50.

<sup>62</sup> The passive infinitives in *-ier*, however, reappear in the second book of *Epistles*, a warning against confident claims about the tone of the different collections; see Roby 1 §614 for the form.

<sup>63</sup> L. provides references on *S.* 1.4.80.

<sup>64</sup> Jocelyn on *Enn. scen.* 71 reckons the stylistic level of the termination in *-ere* is obscure (in the time of Ennius); it is, however, rare in late Republican prose (Roby 1 §578).

ing far-fetched. One of his most subtle devices for achieving this was the invention of new words or phrases which evoke from a slight distance a common expression of daily life (the practice was as old as Ennius<sup>65</sup>). When, for example, a Roman wanted to say 'in(to) the open' he might use the phrases *in apertum* or *in aperto*; but when Horace wants this idea at 6.24 he invents the unusual and more suggestive expression, *in aprico*. Or again, the common Latin for 'at last' is *ad extremum*; we find it at 1.9. But at 18.35 we meet instead the phrase *ad imum*; commentators assume that this means basically the same thing as *ad extremum* though in the context it also suggests a moral nadir.<sup>66</sup> Such novelties give distinction to their sentences by moving a step away from the everyday expressions which they recall.

Somewhat similarly at 15.29 where Horace refers to a man distinguishing between friend and foe he could easily have written the common verb *discerneret*, but instead he preferred a coinage, *dinosceret*. The first readers had no trouble, but were surely aware that this was not the run-of-the-mill word. In an opposite direction to coinage, Horace will take already available verbs, say *elimino* at 5.25 or *limo* at 14.38, and endow them with a sense different from what they had in ordinary usage, but still reasonable, given the etymology of the words; the reader recognizes the verb well enough but has to think about its etymology and the context for the meaning to become clear. At 20.26 he uses *percontor* for the first time in Latin with a common noun (instead of a pronoun) as direct object; a prose writer would presumably have used *de aeuo* where Horace more crisply writes *aeuum*. There is no ambiguity, but a clear little break with standard practice. A similar sort of break with usage is seen at 8.4, where a rejected reason is introduced with the phrase *haud quia*. Cicero had developed the formulae for contrasting a rejected with a true reason, and it seems that he rarely used *quia* for the rejected one and never introduced it with *haud*; he preferred *non quo*, which, it should be noted, is the exact metrical equivalent of *haud quia* (at least at the beginning of a line). Horace's reformulation is in fact unique and perhaps therefore would have struck his first readers as

<sup>65</sup> See Jocelyn on Ennius, p. 39 n. 7.

<sup>66</sup> So Kiessling, followed in *TLL* VII 1.1403.47-50: 'fere i. q. imo gradu'. For *ad extremum* see *TLL* V 2.2008.28-44.

unusual, but yet perfectly clear.<sup>67</sup> Similarly at 19.43 *ait* is used instead of *inquit* when no definite speaker is in mind; it may seem an insignificant enough change, but the fact is that we encounter it nowhere else in Latin, not even in poetry.

Sometimes we find him endowing common words with new meanings, for instance, *fluito* (18.110n.); or he will venture an unusual form, such as *imperor* (5.21n.). Many more such small points of usage are clear divergences from the prose (and, it is assumed, the spoken) norm; in this way Horace, without using an obviously poetic diction, creates his own idiom, a language that moves alongside that of the prose-speakers, evoking their idiom but not reproducing it.

A similar feature of Horace's poetic style (one not confined to his hexameters) is the avoidance of *technical terminology*.<sup>68</sup> It might have been expected that in poems which refer to daily life it would be possible to refer bluntly to, say, the magistrate's seat, but that becomes in his urbane idiom 'the curule ivory' (6.54n.). Horace seems to anticipate the objection of Dr Johnson to the graceless pedantry of Milton, who did not hesitate to obtrude technical jargon into his epos.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, Horace is ready enough to employ *legal* or *medical* terminology where it makes its point.<sup>70</sup>

Other strategies for distinguishing his diction from everyday usage are his *coinages* and *lexical Grecisms*. It is important to appreciate that he intended the procedure to benefit speakers of Latin generally; Horace did not want to create a merely poetic diction. As usual, he has his eye on serving the Roman people as a whole. He sees coinages particularly as enriching Latium, not just her poets.<sup>71</sup> So his new words are not meant to sound highfalutin; his first readers were being implicitly invited to make use of the novelties in their own daily lives. Once

<sup>67</sup> For Cicero's practice see H-S 588, for *haud quia* TLL VI 3.2564.1-2 and for Horace's use of *haud* generally L. on S. 1.1.35.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Jocelyn on Enn. *scen.* 2, 39, 127, 232.

<sup>69</sup> See S. Johnson, *Life of Milton* 110 (Everyman edn).

<sup>70</sup> Dr D. R. Langslow drew my attention to Horace's medical vocabulary. Legalisms came naturally to Romans; cf. Jocelyn on Ennius, Index s.v. legal language.

<sup>71</sup> *Ep.* 2.2.119-21 *adsciscet noua, quae genitor produxerit usus . . . Latiumque beabit diuite lingua.*