

A CAT MAY LOOK AT A KING.  
DIFFERENCE AND INDIFFERENCE IN HORACE, *SATIRE 6*

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If one goes looking for subversion in ancient literature, there is no more obvious hunting ground than satire. From Cleon's rivalry with the sausage-seller in Aristophanes' *Knights*, to the emperor Claudius dragged from heaven to the underworld to become a lawyer's clerk, to Sejanus' statue melted down to make chamber-pots in Juvenal 10, we approach satirical writing positively expecting to find fantasies of political systems dismantled and social hierarchies toppled. But where into this canonically disruptive panorama are we to fit the *Satires* of Horace, which are, after all, central to the history of the genre in Rome? In their way, these poems work a small miracle. Not only do they consolidate and define satire as a literary genre: they also consolidate the author himself, a new arrival on the social and literary scene, and they integrate him in such a way that the existing order is left entirely undisturbed. Or so it seems. Everyone has his place in Maecenas' house, says Horace, just as everyone should stick to his place in society as a whole, and he himself presents a quite unsatirical-seeming front of deference and irreproachable virtue. Horace avoids crowds; he doesn't dance in any Bakhtinian street carnival. Is it true to say, then, that at the very moment of its classification, which is the eve of a political revolution, Roman satire looks more like a conservative genre than a revolutionary one?

My focus is a poem that seems to bear this out: Horace's *Satire 6*, which appears at the centre of a book of poems written during the Second Triumvirate, 37/36 BC, a time of great political instability, when Octavian was just beginning to emerge as the best prospect for peace. In it Horace nails his colours to Maecenas, a likely broker for the new regime, and defends himself against complaints that a man of humble origins, son of an ex-slave, no less, has risen to the top after the civil wars and found favour with a great man. Horace gives many precedents for social mobility even in the dark ages of

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Rome's history and leads us to expect that he will press for further social and political reforms and his own place in the new order. But this is short-lived. He goes on to disappoint these expectations, openly criticizing those with political ambitions and crowing about his own very quiet life as a *privatus* instead.

The usual story told about Horace (though much of the evidence is circular and based on interpretations of his own poems in the ancient biographies and commentaries)<sup>1</sup> is that he was a freedman's son who, after fighting on the wrong side at the battle of Philippi, became a small cog in the Augustan machine as a *scriba quaestorius*, part of the staff of a *quaestor*; at some point he also, whether thanks to money or his military tribuneship, became an *eques*<sup>2</sup>. Now there is no mention of scribal office explicitly in *sat.* 1 (Horace's interactions with the *scribae* in *sat.* II 6 have been thought to suggest membership or close association). But a number of clues can be found in references to the tools of the trade – paperwork, briefcases and sore eyes – along with obsessively disparaging remarks about other *scribae*<sup>3</sup>.

If these clues are followed, they tell us that Horace was a member of the administrative classes, the *apparitores* or bureaucratic staff of magistrates. Our understanding of these offices, which have been scrutinized more closely than ever in recent years, is still hazy<sup>4</sup>. It is hard to generalize about whether they were professional posts or mere sinecures, and it is by no means clear how rigorously they were organized<sup>5</sup>. Traditionally it has been understood that there were four main groups, *lictiores*, *viatores*, *scribae* and *praecones*, each with a complex hierarchy of sub-groups. In many ways these offices shadowed the structures of the higher magistracies they served: there were similarly exacting criteria for membership; there was a similarly strong sense of corporate *dignitas*. Equivalent public relations problems were caused by those who let the side down, and the groups shared similar anxieties about the unclassified nonentities straining at their margins.

It has been said that the apparitorial *ordines* institutionalized social mobility and provided a springboard for an ambitious Roman's career. Nicholas

<sup>1</sup> See Suet. *vita Hor.* with FRAENKEL 1957, 1-23 for the essential outline and MARTINDALE 1993 for a more sceptical approach. AMPOLO 1984 voices doubts about Horace's scribal status (rejected by PURCELL 2001, 640 n. 25).

<sup>2</sup> TAYLOR 1925; ARMSTRONG 1995, 256-263.

<sup>3</sup> *Sat.* II 6,36-37. See ARMSTRONG 1995, 263-267 on Horace's scribal status; PURCELL 2001, 669 on writing implements as the emblems of the scribal trade; GOWERS 2003, 67-68 for scribal clues in *sat.* I (1,120-121; 5,30-31; 5,35; 5,66-69; 7,3; 10,92) and on 5,104 as a scribal 'epitaph'. Dismissive remarks about other *scribae*: *sat.* I 1,120; 5,35; 5,66-69; II 5,56.

<sup>4</sup> See HINARD 1976; COHEN 1984; PURCELL 1983; BADIAN 1989; PURCELL 2001; DAVID 2007.

<sup>5</sup> PURCELL 1983, 129-131; BADIAN 1989, 598.

Purcell has called the apparitorial world ‘the world of the social climber’<sup>6</sup>. Being an *apparitor* gave access to powerful *nobiles* and thus sometimes to further promotion – becoming an equestrian, like Horace, for example. The system was just one organized, middle-rank container among many in a vastly fluid society in the late Republic, where anyone freeborn and talented with the right connections might swim to the top. Mobile poets like Horace from the provinces ‘fitted comfortably’, in Peter Wiseman’s words, ‘into a Roman society dominated ... by Maecenas of Arretium, the obscurely born Vipsanius Agrippa and the *princeps* himself from a small town in Latium’<sup>7</sup>.

But ‘comfortable’ is perhaps not the right word. Purcell is closer to the mark when he writes that ‘marginal institutions like the apparitorial rank, neither menial nor exalted, were natural points of strain’<sup>8</sup>. The constitution of the apparitorial orders was mixed and their rules of entry are still unfathomable. Freedmen rubbed shoulders with *ingenui*, Romans with Italians from the provinces or even conquered foreigners; respectability and education got one in, but so did money, from whatever source. The *apparitores* were still tainted, to various degrees, by the stigma attached in Rome to any kind of trade<sup>9</sup>. They also had hugely negative associations with pushy self-promotion. Purcell now concludes that the flabbiness of the system (its ‘half-hearted institutional regulation’) served overall to allow the ambitious some fulfilment but ultimately to keep them in check<sup>10</sup>.

The resulting strain shows when we look at the rhetoric used by *apparitores* or those who talked about them<sup>11</sup>. There was jostling for status, minute distinctions drawn and snide remarks made, on the margins of entry and both across and within the various *ordines*. Cicero in the *Verrines* creates his own criteria for entry to the *ordo* of scribes, a relatively prestigious and therefore more socially threatening group, by distinguishing between honourable and responsible members of the *ordo* and those who brought disgrace on it through soliciting, shabby finances, social promiscuity and loud-mouthed self-promotion:

*itaque ex his scribis qui digni sunt illo ordine, patribus familias, uiris bonis atque honestis, percontamini quid sibi istae quinquagesimae uelint: iam omnibus intel-*

<sup>6</sup> PURCELL 1983, 136.

<sup>7</sup> WISEMAN 1971, 52.

<sup>8</sup> PURCELL 1983, 132.

<sup>9</sup> PURCELL 1983, 136; PURCELL 2001, 665; 668-670. *Nep. Eum.* 1.5 distinguishes between the mercenary nature of scribal office in Rome and the relative prestige of the equivalent group in Greece.

<sup>10</sup> PURCELL 2001, 671: ‘an astonishingly sophisticated way of regulating ... social mobility.’

<sup>11</sup> I have learned much from Marden Nichols’s comparison of the self-effacing rhetoric of two Augustan *apparitores*, Horace and Vitruvius, in her PhD thesis (University of Cambridge, 2009): see NICHOLS 2009.

*legetis nouam rem totam atque indignam uideri. ad eos me scribas reuoca, si placet, noli hos colligere, qui nummulis corrogatis de nepotum donis ac de scaenicorum corollariis, cum decuriam emerunt, ex primo ordine explosorum in secundum ordinem ciuitatis se uenisse dicunt.*

(Cic. *II Verr.* III 183-184)

Such divisive assessments like these are typical of those found in the ancient sources. Other marginal social groups risked similar slurs (predictably, given that there was overlap: an *apparitor* might start as a freedman's son and end as an *eques*, as Horace himself apparently did)<sup>12</sup>. Unsurprisingly, then, we find that *liberti*, new *equites* and *apparitores*, when they find a voice, all resort to similar defensive strategies, of which denial is the hallmark: denial of ambition and denial of interest in moneymaking or social networking. A freedman of the Tiberian period leaves behind an epitaph presenting himself in negative terms as someone who lived *sine lite, sine rixa, sine controuersia, sine aere alieno*, loyal to his friends and cash-poor, asset-rich, the chief asset being his virtue<sup>13</sup>. The architect Vitruvius, another Augustan *apparitor*, emphasizes not his professional talent but his innate decency, his moral parity with the best freeborn citizens. He advises clients to check that an architect is respectably educated and modest, not pushy: *si honeste essent educati, ingenuo pudori, non audaciae proteruitatis permittendum iudicantes...* (VI praef. 6).

Apparitorial identity thus bristled with all the tensions of a permeable social group. From the outside, the *ordines* could (and can still) be seen either as putting a lid on the social and political ambition of its members or as dangerous and disruptive. One man's *industria* was another man's shameful 'trade'; one man's *uirtus* another man's ambition; one man's loyalty to his friends another man's parasitism; one man's integrated citizen another man's social pollutant. Not surprisingly, Purcell comments that 'the upwardly mobile *apparitor* is a natural inhabitant of the satirical milieu', and he notes that two well-known late Republican *scribae*, Horace and his friend Julius Florus, are recorded as being authors of satires, which certainly in Horace's case featured various unspeakable members of his own *ordo* along with members of *ordines* with less prestige<sup>14</sup>.

Why mention the *apparitores* at all when Horace himself avoids doing so in *sat.* 6? Because the focus of his paranoia here – the charge of unseemly ambition – is so strongly reminiscent of this group's 'intermediate' status anxieties. Horace, like Vitruvius, retaliates by adopting an identity that is conspicuously mobile and indefinable, suspended between vulgar origins

<sup>12</sup> For example, the ex-slave derided for presuming to become an *eques* in *epod.* 4.

<sup>13</sup> *CIL* VI 8012.

<sup>14</sup> PURCELL 2001, 648-649.

(6,18 *a uulgo longe longeque remotos*) and unseemly aspiration (6,51-52 *praua | ambitione procul*). In that sense the poem lives out an escapist fantasy, a dream of independence and unassailable integrity, which, though (or because) remote from notions of bureaucratic routine, can equally be regarded as ‘apparitorial’ in aspiration. Horace uses the fluidity of the groups he belongs to as an advantage; he presents himself as inoffensive and loyal to friends at different stages of his life. But the poem is also doing some very important defence-work in clearing his passage through a competitive world, and – this is my main point – that involves quite ruthlessly subverting the dignity of those now below him in the social order, as well as the dignity of those above him.

At the start of the poem, Horace returns to a conversation with his current friend, or enviably impressive patron, Maecenas, which he started earlier, in *sat.* 1, when he asked why anyone would ever pursue social mobility, when contentment exists in the here and now. *Sat.* 6 asks the same question, but now it is a personal one, not an abstraction. Making Maecenas the addressee of this poem gives an extra dimension to what Horace has to say. This wild card, the unclassifiable pangolin of Roman society and politics – Epicurean statesman, *éminence grise* without official status, outsider at the centre of things – is good for Horace to think with as he tracks his own path from the outside to the Roman centre, watched by what Maud Gleason has called ‘a forest of eyes’, the invidious, potentially satirical spectators who jeopardize all social sense of self<sup>15</sup>.

Horace preempts insult by chanting over and over the refrain he expects to be hurled at him as an arriviste: *libertino patre natum*, ‘born of a freedman father’ (*sat.* I 6,6; 6,45; 6,46). How literally should we take this pedigree? Gordon Williams has attempted ingeniously to remove the problem by arguing that Horace’s father was only briefly a slave in any sense, when his hometown Venusia was conquered by Rome in the Social Wars<sup>16</sup>. We also need to negotiate the possibility that for some indefinite period in Republican history *libertinus* meant not ‘son of a freedman’ but ‘son of the son of a freedman’ – another slippery word, then<sup>17</sup>. Literary critics like Catherine Schlegel regard the association with freedmen as more of a *generic* ploy for the satirist: Horace is joining a long line of candid interlocutors of great men, including the Hellenistic freedman’s son Bion, whose headstrong interview

<sup>15</sup> GLEASON 1995, 55.

<sup>16</sup> WILLIAMS 1995.

<sup>17</sup> According to Suet. *Claud.* 24; cf. Isid. *orig.* IX 4,47. Thanks to Ewen Bowie for pointing this out to me. However, TREGGIARI 1969, 52-53 rejects Suetonius and reasserts the claim that *libertinus* means a freedman in relation to society, *libertus* a freedman in relation to his *patronus*.

with King Antigonus is recorded by Diogenes Laertius<sup>18</sup>. At any rate, sons of freedmen in the late Republic had one big advantage over their fathers: there was no impediment to their mobility other than social stigma<sup>19</sup>. Horace complains about the abuse he gets, but we might more cynically point out that the refrain drives home one very important point about his status: there is no question, at least, that he is not freeborn<sup>20</sup>.

Horace's opening draws him into a centuries-old debate among philosophers and political thinkers, from Aristotle to Bion to Seneca, about the moral superiority of distinguished birth<sup>21</sup>. None of the rhetoric in this poem is new: it reads as a low-level version of what Peter Wiseman has called Republican 'new man's ideology' or 'propaganda'<sup>22</sup>. Vocabulary that had traditionally identified moral virtue with the behaviour of the freeborn or the *nobiles* – doubled-up words like *honestus*, *generosus*, *liber(alis)*, *nobilis* and *ingenuus* – had been mobilized and redeployed in the service of a class war between the old aristocracy and the new meritocracy, between birth and virtue (even if 'virtue' was just a convenient gloss for scraping together the finances, keeping on the right side of the law, meeting the right people and adding a dash of liberal education)<sup>23</sup>. Perhaps the most famous example of such a defence is the speech Sallust puts into the 'new man' Marius' mouth in *Jugurtha*, a passionate appeal for the 'true nobility' of service to the state and of personal probity over splendid ancestors<sup>24</sup>. But the subject was topical and especially malleable in 37 BC, when the social and political opportunities available under the new regime were still a subject of speculation<sup>25</sup>.

Horace continues the conversation started by Marius when he lays a number of these contested trap-words in Maecenas' path. *Nemo generosior est te*, describing the noble patron in line 2, answers Marius the military hero's claim that *fortissimum quemque generosissimum*, 'bravery is the real nobility' (Sall. *Iug.* 85). In fact, it restores *noblesse oblige* to its rightful place: back with the nobility. Maecenas' moral generosity is made a consequence of his

<sup>18</sup> SCHLEGEL 2005, 38-58. See MOLES 2007, 166-167 for a convenient table of parallels between Horace. *sat.* I 6 and Bion fr. 1 Kindstrand.

<sup>19</sup> TREGGIARI 1969, 229-236.

<sup>20</sup> The 'son of a freedman' insult might be pitched as a compromise to ward off worse insults.

<sup>21</sup> RUDD 1966, 49-53; EARL 1967, 52-54; WISEMAN 1971, 107-116.

<sup>22</sup> WISEMAN 1971, 110-111. See DUGAN 2005, 7-13 on the new man Cicero's rhetorical construction of his own advancement and his alterations to Marius' 'familiar script'.

<sup>23</sup> See EARL 1961, 28-40 and PAANANEN 1972, 48-89 on Sallust's reformulation of *nobilitas*. See AGNATI 2000, 15-56 on the mobility of *ingenuitas* in Horace's poetry: 'ora le sfumature ironiche, ora il senso tecnico e giuridico, ora la pregnanza morale' (56).

<sup>24</sup> Sall. *Iug.* 85.

<sup>25</sup> See PURCELL 2001, 672 on the centralized system of imperial machinery that eventually disempowered the *apparitores*.

natural blue blood, his *generositas*. His patron is not so snooty, Horace says, as to care about the social distinctions as long as the person in question is *ingenuus* (6,8). Here is another trap-word, which can mean technically either ‘freeborn’ or ‘having the moral qualities traditionally associated with the freeborn’<sup>26</sup>. It may well be the case that Maecenas thought actual slaves or freedmen too low to be his associates, just as Augustus did, but Horace challenges Maecenas not to be a snob but set store by ethical distinction. One kind of difference, birth, is exchanged for another one, inner worth. Horace and Maecenas share their ability to make distinctions; it’s just that the criteria are not the usual ones (6,5 *ut plerique solent*). But the nose of satirical criticism is nonetheless sniffing about for its victims.

This is no revolutionary tendency on Maecenas’ part, says Horace, quenching Marius’ fire. New men from even the time before King Servius Tullius and his lowborn sovereignty, his *ignobile regnum* (6,9), have been able to move freely up the ranks. Any early king’s name would do here, but this one must be a pointed choice: the son of a slave-mother who became a king spans the full social spectrum in one person. In addition, he shares his other name with the most famous ‘new man’ in recent Roman history: Marcus Tullius Cicero, often called King Tullius for behaving above his station<sup>27</sup>. Both slaves and kings, too low and too lordly at once: new men are getting a bad press from Horace (the adjective *superbus*, attached to Servius’ Etruscan successor Tarquin, has its full force here – *superbia* was a vice Marius had decried – and *ignobilis* could already mean ‘unworthy’)<sup>28</sup>. But if men who are morally uncorrupted have always been showered with honours, then everything is in its right place, that is, in a logical circle: the *honesti* have always won the *honores* they deserve. Horace’s contempt for a worthless contemporary aristocrat, Laevinus, rejected by the plebs, goes hand in hand with contempt for the greater mass of the electorate, the un-noble in birth *and* behaviour: idiots, slaves and snobs dazzled by effete nobility.

There follows (lines 23-37) a satirical version of the Republican *cursus honorum*, or traditional career path for the elite: a world with a relentless cycle of ins and outs and ins again. The pursuit of Glory by obscure and noble alike becomes metaphorical enslavement: her followers are chained to her triumphal chariot (6,23 *constrictos*) or stifled by the slave-like fetters of office (6,27-28 *quisque insanus nigris medium impediit crus pellibus*). Vestigial slave-fetters of a more tangible kind, real or invented, were the Achilles’ heel of many an Augustan *apparitor*: for example, the *scriba*, Sarmentus, pilloried

<sup>26</sup> AGNATI 2000.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Cic. *Att.* I 16,10.

<sup>28</sup> Sall. *Iug.* 85.

as a *scurra*, a pushy parasite, and a runaway slave in Horace's *sat.* 5. A telling anecdote about him is narrated in a scholion on Juvenal 5: when Sarmentus dared to push his way into the equestrians' seats at the theatre, the crowd turned on him, rousing each other to 'tie up his fetters', i.e. reveal his real slave-like colours. Sarmentus' presumptions lie behind *sat.* 6, too, as a foil to Horace's modesty, and they tell us something about the pitfalls of apparitorial success<sup>29</sup>.

Despite this opening, Horace ends the passage surprisingly. Instead of appealing for further mobility for the humbly born, he seems to push his own head back under the water: if he had tried to make his way to the senate, he says, he would have been rightfully excluded like other pushy freedmen's sons, for not lying low in his own skin (6,22 *quoniam in propria non pelle quiessem*). What promised to be a document for the vindication of the rights of the 'new man' ends up discouraging the lowborn from taking the final step and urging retreat from the political arena.

Some recent readers of the poem, however, have seen the disavowal of *political* ambition, 'easy for Horace', in Ellen Oliensis's words, even once he has confessed his brief distinction (6,48 *olim*) as military tribune, as a mere smokescreen to hide the real head of steam coming from a different area: his meteoric *social* rise and his present position, *nunc*, in the circle of Maecenas (6,47)<sup>30</sup>. Two separate forms of success are in play. Yet there will always be a conceptual overlap between the social and the political, the world of patronage and the world of politics, inasmuch as they overlap in practice. In both spheres, the vices of canvassing, pushiness, bribery and loud-mouthedness must be routinely disavowed.

Horace's modest personal emergence is, as I claimed earlier, built on the backs of many lesser people who are sifted out in the various stages of selection. The scenario we find in lines 38-44 works as a model for the whole poem, and indeed of Roman social tensions as a whole: a shouting match between a freeborn voter and a freedman's son promoted to magistrate, who defends his success on the grounds that pushier men are rising in the ranks below, or, as he puts it, the rank *behind* in the theatre (the place where, thanks to the *Lex Roscia*, social stratification was put on public display). But, as so often, any technical distinctions here are distorted by the slurs of invective: this 'slave' may in reality be a 'freedman', that 'freedman' may be a 'freedman's son'<sup>31</sup>. The accusations here again include brashness

<sup>29</sup> TREGGIARI 1969, 271-272.

<sup>30</sup> OLIENSIS 1998, 31.

<sup>31</sup> DAMON 1992 in an acute discussion of Cicero's invective notes his tendency to lower a victim's rank as part of his technique (229: 'when a man of Cicero's station wanted to insult a freedman, he didn't

(6,38 *audes*), ‘sounding off’ (6,43 *magna sonabit*) and simple newness (6,40 *Novius*). These arrivistes’ right to punish Roman citizens – throwing them off the Tarpeian rock or handing them over to the executioner (6,39 *deicere* versus *tradere*) – is a parody version of the rejections and transfers of politics and patronage. Throughout the poem Horace looks down on what he used to be, or might have been – the people in the rows behind. Slaves, for a start. Slaves who carry his school bags (6,78 *seruos sequentis*) or a praetor’s squalid baggage (6,109 *pueri portantes*); slaves who attend him at home in Rome (6,116): all are left to pick up the burdens he has so gloriously dropped. But the greatest scorn is reserved for those closest to Horace’s original status, like the praetor Tillius, probably an ambitious freedman’s son himself<sup>32</sup>.

It is no coincidence that the man abused in the row behind at the theatre turns out to be a public crier or auctioneer, with a voice that can apparently out-blare central Rome at rush hour. The Latin word missing here is *praeco*, another ambiguous term which can mean anything from small-town auctioneer or town-crier to a member of a specific branch of the *apparitores*, the public announcers<sup>33</sup>. Because of the confusion with brash salesmen, these official *praecones* took the most of the negative burden of the *apparitores*’ image. They were cast as the ‘wide boys’ of the Roman world, whose dramatic career-leaps, from used-goods salesmen to millionaires, made them scapegoats for all the other civil servants: brassy promoters of their own and others’ reputations<sup>34</sup>. Loud-mouthed *praecones* are among the chief victims of *sat. I*: they free up the quieter, more bookish *scribae* to enjoy a positive glow<sup>35</sup>.

bring up servile origins, he asserted that the fellow was still a slave’). She might well have compared *sat. 6*.

<sup>32</sup> ARMSTRONG 1995; TOHER 2005 claims he was of senatorial rank.

<sup>33</sup> See HINARD 1976 on the ambiguity of the term, which seems to have been a hold-all for many professional activities that employed the voice: ‘L’essentiel de la profession du *praeco*, c’est la voix’ (742). See also DAVID 2003. The part played by two funerals in Horace’s Roman traffic jam is significant: some *praecones* were called on to officiate at funerals (HINARD 1976, 735).

<sup>34</sup> PURCELL 1983, 147-148 comments on the ‘particularly spectacular’ social mobility of *praecones*, though HINARD 1976, 746 concludes that their role was essentially auxiliary; they were part of the ‘petit personnel d’un magistrat’. Hor. *ars* 419 (cited by HINARD 1976, 737) compares the self-advertising poet to a *praeco*, forcing his wares on a crowd. The *praeco* Naevius is pilloried by Cicero in *Pro Quinctio* as reduced to an inferior means of livelihood, one tainted by notions of prostitution and parasitism: 11 *neque parum facetus scurra Sex. Naevius, neque inhumane praeco est existimatus*; 13 *cum ei natura nihil melius quam uocem dedisset, pater nihil praeter libertatem reliquisset, uocem in quaestum contulit, libertate usus quo impunius dicax esset*; 95 *cuius uox in praeconio quaestu prostitit*. Witness the hard defence-work that has gone into one *praeco*’s epitaph: *ILLRP 808 pudentis hominis, frugi, cum magna fide*.

<sup>35</sup> HINARD 1976, 746 n. 49 cites Mommsen’s suggestion (*ad* Ascon. *Cornel.* p. 58 Or.) that an illiterate *praeco* might have had his text whispered to him by a *scriba*. The verbosity and pushiness of Horace’s enemy the pest in *sat. 9*, so keen to act as PR man (9,46 *magnum adiutorem*) and to clear Maecenas’ path

At the centre of this noisy urban panorama comes the eye in the storm. Horace's first interview with Maecenas is brokered by two poets further up in the pecking order, Virgil and Varius, who once propelled a blushing, stammering youth into the great man's presence and forced him to blurt out everything he was not: not the son of a noble father, not endowed with country estates (6,58-59 *non ego me claro natum patre, non ego circum | me Satureiano uectari rura caballo*). This does not just suggest a Homeric question and answer session – 'Where are you from and who was your father?' – the questions King Antigonus asked Bion; it is not just an admission of difference from the equestrian satirist Lucilius (David Armstrong argues that Horace is admitting he too is an equestrian – but a newly made one, thanks to his military tribuneship)<sup>36</sup>. It is in fact clearly recognisable as the new man or *apparitor's* standard profession of poverty, of his humble but respectable origins and, crucially, of his lack of ambition.

Horace's stammer lingers in the Latin of the reminiscence: 6,57 *pudor prohibebat plura profari*<sup>37</sup>. His blush I have reconstructed out of the word *pudor*, here specifically *infans ... pudor*, speechless embarrassment. This is an efficacious phrase. For a start, it serves to represent Horace as a naïf, but as one who is properly aware of the social gulf between himself and his addressee. More usefully still, it gives him his own status lift. The adjective normally attached to *pudor* is *ingenuus*, 'characteristic of a free man' (Vitruvius, for example, had used this combination<sup>38</sup>). Slaves in Rome allegedly did not blush, because they had no moral expectations to fulfil, no side to let down<sup>39</sup>. Thus Horace's blush reveals his innately 'freeborn' nature; his sense of shame separates him decisively from the social category he has left behind. By contrast with the ins and outs of Republican politics, the flux of picking up and putting down, his introduction to Maecenas is also made innocent of the hierarchies and mechanisms of patronage: missing is the word *tradere*, of recommending a client to a patron (cp. 6,39 *tradere*; 9,47 *hunc hominem uelles si tradere*); so is *adsumere*, the standard term for the patron's 'take-up' (cp. 6,51 *cautum dignos adsumere*); so, indeed, is the word *sequi*, of Horace's falling into line (cp. 6,78 *seruosque sequentis*, of attendant slaves)<sup>40</sup>.

of obstacles (9,48 *summosse*; 9,59 *deducam*), recall the stereotypical characteristics of the *praeco*. Of course Horace's advertising of his own and Maecenas' reticence at 6,56-57; 6,60-61 and 6,123 is just a more discreet form of *praeconium*.

<sup>36</sup> ARMSTRONG 1995, 259-260.

<sup>37</sup> GOWERS 2003, 79-80.

<sup>38</sup> VI *praef.* 6 (see above, p. 304); AGNATI 2000.

<sup>39</sup> KASTER 1997; KASTER 2005, 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> See SALLER 1989, 57-61 on the Roman tendency to disguise unequal patron-client relations as 'friendship'.

As this affecting scene fades, Maecenas the respected patron gives way to the figure of Horace's humble but even more respected freedman father, regarded by some as the most affectionate portrait of a parent in Latin literature. Indeed, Horace states proudly that he would never have exchanged this father for any other. But what sort of filial piety is this? The father is primarily useful because he marks the difference between Horace's 'then' and Horace's 'now'<sup>41</sup>. He takes the credit for his son's necessary moral purity; but being an ex-slave with chutzpah *he* did not blush (6,76 *est ausus* – ironic) to send his son to Rome with a senatorial entourage. He behaved like the small-town *praeco* he was, with brazen ambitions for a better future for his heirs<sup>42</sup>. To be a second-generation *praeco*, good enough for him, is clearly not good enough for Horace, despite his pious assurances: *scriba* is a step up the social scale, though the presumption that got him there can be left at someone else's door<sup>43</sup>. Left behind in Venusia are Horace's former peers: the centurions' sons, future accountants with their almanacs, petty cash and undistinguished pedigrees, who once towered over him at the village school but, unlike him, had to carry their own bags (6,73-75).

Horace, meanwhile, has a gentleman's education ahead of him, a steeper trajectory. Just as he wears the uniform of a senator or an *eques*' son (no proud cynical peasant costume here), so the education he receives is in the *liberal arts*. The trap-word *liberalis* is tactfully missing, paraphrased instead: 6,77-78 *artis quas doceat quivis eques atque senator | semet prognatos*. This is the kind of education suitable for the freeborn, but traditionally another means of passage for those ascending the social scale (Sallust's Marius apologizes for never having learned Greek)<sup>44</sup>. The local school run by Flavius (probably a freedman's name) was not good enough for Horace's father, and he chose to act as his son's moral guardian (6,81 *custos incorruptissimus*) in Rome. Why? Presumably because he had too low an opinion of slaves to leave the job to them. And with a certain economy, he himself was able to

<sup>41</sup> JOHNSON 1993, 28-30; GOWERS 2003, 72.

<sup>42</sup> OLIENSIS 1998, 33-34; GOWERS 2003, 72. For *audacia* as the virtual opposite of *pudor*, see Vitruvius VI praef. 6 (above p. 304); for its political charge in the late Republic see WIRSZUBSKI 1961, esp. 20 (*audaces* 'belongs primarily to the typically Optimate vocabulary of political reproach'); KASTER 1997, 16 n. 39 ('*audacia* and *audax* are among Cicero's most commonly used scare-terms, stigmatizing any challenge to the interests he is defending').

<sup>43</sup> PURCELL 1983, 154-155 notes that there were many fewer freedmen among the *scribae* than in other *ordines* and many more subsequent *equites*. *Scribae* regularly take first place in ancient lists of the various *ordines*.

<sup>44</sup> PURCELL 1983, 142-146 on *scribae* and education.

step in and perform the office of *paedagogus*, the freedman guardian Horace needed in order to equal any scion of the elite<sup>45</sup>.

By the end of the poem only one figure seems to be left beyond reproach. It looks as though Horace's work of self-effacing self-promotion has also stealthily reinforced the position of his patron Maecenas as a natural-born aristocrat: generous, refined and discriminating. But where is the real *noblesse oblige* in this poem; who is really speaking *de haut* and who is *en bas*? Who is this Maecenas and where does he come from anyway?

'Maecenas, glory of Roman knights' (*carm.* III 16,20 *Maecenas, equitum decus*), 'Maecenas, descended from Etruscan kings' (*carm.* I 1,1 *atauis edite regibus*; *carm.* III 29,1 *Tyrrhena regum progenies*): Horace is capable of restrained, if sometimes teasing, encomium for his patron in the *Odes*. But is this aristocratic pose something that needs all the extra solidity Horace can give it? Could it even do with a little shaking? Lines 1-8 of *sat.* 6 read: 'Despite the fact, Maecenas, that of all the Lydian settlers in Etruscan lands, no one's blood is bluer than yours, and though you had maternal and paternal grandfathers who were field marshals, you do not sniff at me down your Roman nose; you don't give a damn where a man is from as long as he's a decent human being.' Horace is mocking Maecenas, it seems, for being sucked into the contemporary fashion for genealogy, like those members of the Roman elite who traced their families back to Aeneas' Trojan companions<sup>46</sup>. Maecenas traced his ancestors to old Etruscan kings and military heroes, and thence to Lydians who had settled in Etruria<sup>47</sup>.

But Horace's language is just a little odd here: 6,1 *Lydorum quidquid* sounds suspiciously like 'Lydian riff-raff', nameless Lydians at any rate, in a poem full of significant names. And Lydians were known above all in contemporary Rome as *slaves*. Cicero in *Pro Flacco*, at the end of a long list of searing remarks about Asian immigrants, says: just look at comedy, how many leading slaves there are called *Lydus* (*Flacc.* 65 *quis umquam Graecus comoediam scripsit in qua seruus primarum partium non Lydus esset?*). These primeval Lydians are next described as 'settlers on Etruscan territory': 6,1-2 *Etruscos | incoluit finis*. But another common meaning of *incola* is 'resident alien' (*OLD* sv. 2). We might be reminded of Sallust's Catiline (*Catil.* 31,7), who shouted across the senate-house floor that Cicero was an *inquilinus civis urbis Romae*, only a temporary resident of Rome. Horace is pointing out, be-

<sup>45</sup> ANDERSON 1995, 160-161 and JOHNSON 1993, 29-31 both assume some suppressed embarrassment on Horace's part.

<sup>46</sup> RAWSON 1985, 231.

<sup>47</sup> Etruria, whose own origins are so obscure, makes a good beginning to a poem about origins. SCULLARD 1969, 18 speaks of 'the haunting question of "whence?"'.

tween the lines, that if you go far back enough, everyone is an outsider; Maecenas, indeed, started from further East than he did. Seneca, quoting Plato, said the same in *epist.* 44,1: ‘What king isn’t a slave if you go far enough back; what slave isn’t a king?’ (*Platon ait neminem regem non ex seruis esse oriundum, neminem non seruum ex regibus*). It is not even completely clear to which clause 6,5 *ut plerique solent* belongs. It could mean: every *nouveau riche* who goes in for genealogies tends to blow up them up to include a few famous generals.

Conversely, Horace gives himself a helping hand with the example to come: a decayed aristocrat rejected by the plebs, Laevinus (6,12), is described as being from *Valeri genus*, from the old noble house of the Valerii (6,12), which reminds us, as Ian DuQuesnay notes, that his most famous ancestor, P. Valerius Poplicola, was co-consul with L. Iunius Brutus, ancestor of Horace’s disgraced patron M. Brutus<sup>48</sup>. The era of Tarquin is kept in view, then, with hints at all its protagonists but two: Brutus and (his name missing) Horatius Cocles, home-grown banisher of the Etruscans Tarquin and Lars Porsenna, continue to hang in the air<sup>49</sup>. After the Social Wars, when Horace’s father is supposed to have been enslaved, the entire town of Venusia is said to have allied itself with the Roman *tribus Horatiana*<sup>50</sup>. If names count, Horace implies, then I have my ancestors too; they come from right inside the city and they banished your Etruscan kingly ancestors on the outside, however many generalships they may have held.

Besides, what if Maecenas’ laboured genealogies masked, as usual, some fairly murky origins? Perhaps it is time to revive L. A. MacKay’s suggestion that the Etruscan *scriba* Maecenas who attended M. Perperna and C. Tarquilius at the dinner party where Sertorius was murdered (Sall. *hist.* fr. III 83 M.) was not a freedman but a close relative of Maecenas, maybe even his father<sup>51</sup>. That aquiline nose: was it a distinguishing feature like Horace’s blush, or a lucky accident of birth? In any case, *suspendis adunco* (6,5) sounds strangely similar to *suspendis ab unco*, a ritual ejection, like being thrown from the Tarpeian rock (cf. 6,39 *deicere de saxo ciuis*) or like the emperor Claudius being dangled from heaven in the *Apocolocyntosis*. Who is dangling whom from whose nose here? If Maecenas’ father was a *scriba*, Horace could justifiably say: See? I am now what your father was before me!

In the final section of the poem, Horace sheds all dependence on Maecenas and puts on show his own routine as a private citizen. On the road, he

<sup>48</sup> DUQUESNAY 1984, 46.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. GOWERS 2003, 80.

<sup>50</sup> WILLIAMS 1995, 312-313.

<sup>51</sup> MACKAY 1942. See also PURCELL 2001, 647-648.

sheds the *onus* of political responsibility for the humble mule (Greek ὄνος), which bears an *eques*, ‘rider’, of uncertain status (6,106). Armstrong reads ‘equestrian’ decisively here (as he does at 6,59, as a marker of difference between Lucilius’ inherited title and Horace’s earned one), but I think the ambiguity must be intentional: Horace at least plays at disguising his status leap into another fluid social group. Back in Rome at 6,111-128, he rejoices in the freedom of being unplaceable: not too high to do his own marketing, too grand to go to work. Around him in his simple house, open to the censor’s view, is a silent inventory of furniture: the parasitical sideboard and the saltcellar in attendance are substitutes for absent clients and the social round<sup>52</sup>. This is no longer the rhetoric of a *scriba*: no *industria*, long hours, pension fund or municipal dignity. This is an imitation of aristocratic *otium*, or something even more detached. Horace wrinkles his nose at a man who uses cheap oil at the baths (6,124); he doesn’t clock into the office, like up-and-coming bankers (6,119-121). The final sneer, at everyone with ancestors, reserves a last quip for the *quaestor*, lowest rung on the magisterial ladder. In a few seamless moves, Horace has gone from desk-slave to philosophical king. The freedman’s son has effected his own velvet revolution<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> GOWERS 2003, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Another figure blotted out from line 12, along with L. Iunius Brutus, is M. Horatius Puluillus (‘Cushion’), who was a later co-consul with P. Valerius Publicola and surpassed him in republican zeal (Cic. *dom.* 139; Liv. II 8,5-9; Val. Max. V 10,1; Sen. *dial.* VI 13,1-2).

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