

WHAT ARE THE JEWS DOING IN HORACE, *SATIRES* BOOK 1?

WILLIAM FITZGERALD

One aspect of the presence of Jews in the Roman empire is the body of references to Jews and Jewish practices in Latin literature¹. For the most part, these are scattered allusions, which together show a passing familiarity with certain Jewish observances, as well as common misconceptions and xenophobic stereotypes. But there is one work, with no particular thematic reason to mention Jews, that contains an unusual cluster of references which, I will argue, have a coherent role to play in the work as a whole. That work is the first book of Horace's *Satires*.

But we must begin with Cicero, who famously refers to the Jews and Syrians as "nations born for servitude" (*nationibus natis servituti, De Provinciis Consularibus* 5,10), which is about as straightforward an example of imperialist racism as one could find. Cicero refers to the Jews in one other speech, the *Pro Flacco*, and here things are more complicated. In this passage Cicero voices suspicion of the Jews at Rome, but also alludes to potential signs of respect for Jewish religion on the part of Romans. He professes to be concerned about the presence of a vocal and unified group (*illa turba*, 28,66) of Jews in Rome with a powerful interest in the trial of Flaccus. The very *concordia* of the Jews is threatening, he says. They have already made apparent their power in *contiones*, and Cicero will speak softly so as to be heard only by the jurors². We are not so far from Juvenal's Umbricius in *Satire* 3, ranting against the fact that the grove of Egeria has been rented out to Jews with their exotic paraphernalia (12-14). However, Cicero's speech goes on to allude to a different aspect of the Roman relation to Jews. Although he refers to the Jewish religion as a *barbara superstitio* (67), Cicero finds it necessary to deny what the prosecution have presumably asserted, namely that Pompey refrained from removing the gold from the Jewish Temple out of respect for the *religio* of the

¹ The references are conveniently assembled in M. STERN (ed.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, I-III, Jerusalem 1974-1984. For a discussion of Roman attitudes to the Jews, see Z. YAVETZ, *Latin Authors on Jews and Dacians*, "Historia" 47 (1998), 77-107; M. GOODMAN, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, London 2007, 383-394.

² *Scis quanta sit manus, quanta concordia, quantum valet in contionibus. Sic submissa voce agam tantum ut iudices audiant.*

Jews. That, he claims, would be unworthy of the great *imperator* when dealing with the enemies of Rome. It was not *religio* that motivated him but *pudor*, a sense of honour (68).

When Cicero denies that Pompey was motivated by respect for Jewish *religio* he expresses discomfort with what was already a feature of Roman imperial policy towards the Jews as early as the second century BCE. As John Gager puts it, “The basic premise of this policy was the right of Jews to live according to their ancestral custom. It gave them the privilege of making annual donations to the temple in Jerusalem, of settling most disputes within the community, and of freedom from civic obligation on the Sabbath” (this would change after 66 CE)³. Like other oriental cults, Judaism seems to have exerted some influence among the Romans. Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 2,282) claims that observance of the Sabbath had spread to every city, and Seneca, in a passage preserved in St Augustine, complains that “the vanquished have given laws to their conquerors” (*De Civitate Dei* 6,11). We hear of proselytes to Judaism, as well as of a category of sympathizers (Suet. *Dom.* 12) who may or may not have called themselves godfearers (*theosebeis*)⁴. Jewish synagogues, observance of the Sabbath, dietary laws and circumcision belong with priests of Isis, obelisks and pyramids as some of the exotic and partially understood foreign objects and practices that were familiar to Romans as part of their daily experience.

The Jewish presence at Rome makes itself felt in Latin literature primarily through a number of casual references to observation of the Sabbath and other practices, often humorous, and sometimes expressing what one might call a mock solidarity. Take Augustus’ letter to Tiberius, preserved in Suetonius’ *Life*:

Ne Iudaicus quidem, mi Tiberi, tam diligenter Sabbatis ieiunium servat quam ego hodie servavi, qui in balineo demum post horam primam noctis duas buccas manducavi prius quam ungui inciperem.

My Dear Tiberius,

Not even a Jew observes the Sabbath fast so scrupulously as I have done today. Not until dusk did I finally eat a couple of mouthfuls at the baths, before I was rubbed with oil.

(*Aug.* 76,2)

³ J. GAGER, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes towards Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, Oxford 1985, 41.

⁴ The extent of Jewish proselytism is controversial. The maximalist position is put in L. FELDMAN, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions*, Princeton 1993, 289-300. The bibliography, pro and contra, can be found in E. GRUEN, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst the Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2002, 274-275, n. 206. FELDMAN, *Jew...*, 342-382, assembles the evidence for sympathizers and “godfearers”.

Augustus' words combine two common characterizations of the Jews: that they were given to ascetic practices, especially fasting, and that they kept the Sabbath. It was a common misconception that the observation of the Sabbath involved fasting (eg Martial 4,4,7)⁵. Augustus' letter expresses what I have called a "mock solidarity" with the Jews, and perhaps the most striking version of this pose is to be found in the ninth satire of Horace's first book, which consists of an anecdote recounting Horace's encounter with the Bore, as he is usually known. This nameless character attaches himself to Horace as he is strolling on the *Via Sacra* and pesters the poet for an introduction to the circle of Maecenas. Horace tries to shake him off, but in vain; finally, he sights his friend Aristius Fuscus, with whose help he hopes to be delivered from his unfortunate companion. But Fuscus turns out to be a joker, and neatly sidesteps Horace's hint that he might like to speak to the poet in private:

*'certe nescioquid secreto velle loqui te
aiebas mecum'. 'memini bene, sed meliore
tempore dicam: hodie tricesima sabbata: vin tu
curtis Iudaeis oppedere?' 'nulla mihi' inquam
'religio est'. 'at mi: sum paulo infirmior, unus
multorum: ignosces: alias loquar'.*

'I believe you said that you wanted to speak in private
About some matter with me'. 'I remember, but I'll tell you
At a better time. Today is the thirtieth Sabbath: do you want
To fart in the face of the docked Jews?' 'As for me,' I said,
There's no impediment'. 'But there is for me: I'm a little weak,
One of the many; forgive me; I'll speak on another occasion'.

(*Serm.* 1,9,67-72)

Fuscus professes to be acting out of respect for Jewish custom, in the manner that had been attributed to Pompey according to Cicero's *Pro Flacco*; it is as though Fuscus plays the respectful version of Pompey to Horace's skeptical Cicero. But, given the context and purpose of Fuscus' profession of respect for the Sabbath, a more accurate comparison would be with Augustus' facetious association of his fasting with Jewish piety – a joke between members of the imperial elite. Another example of the same pose would be that of Horace's contemporary, Tibullus, who also cites observance of the Sabbath as a disingenuous excuse he might have given to his patron Messalla for staying in Rome with his beloved Delia, rather than accompanying Messalla abroad

⁵ P. SCHAEFER, *Judaeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1997, 89-90.

(Tibullus 1,3,17-18). Horace responds to Fuscus' trick by saying that *he* has no religious qualms, at which Fuscus replies that he, Fuscus, is susceptible to superstition (*sum paulo infirmior*), in which he has plenty of company (*unus / multorum*). This ironic confession of weakness allows him to play a practical joke on the desperate Horace, now regretting that he has shown too much indulgence towards the Bore.

Horace's anecdote transfers the Roman imperial policy of respect towards Jewish religious scruples into the private arena. Official indulgence towards the beliefs and customs of subject peoples, of course, is not necessarily motivated by the highest principles. It may be purely instrumental or strategic, as is the case with Fuscus' practical joke, and it is not incompatible with a haughty contempt. Fuscus claims that he is reluctant to fart in the face of the Jews (*oppedere*), but in the same breath he refers to them as *curtis* (mutilated), hardly a respectful term for circumcision⁶. What he means by the "thirtieth Sabbath" is disputed, but it looks as if this detail is Fuscus' invention, intended as a typical piece of Jewish mumbo-jumbo rather than a display of interest in Jewish practices⁷. His profession of respect for the Sabbath is a transparent ruse, but it is plausible enough that Horace is obliged to accept it⁸. There could hardly be a better way of dramatizing an awkward foreign presence that cannot quite be ignored, and may indeed exert a certain curiosity or fascination. But we must not forget that this is a poem written by Horace the poet, and that the discomfiture of Horace the character in this satire brings the poem to a climax with an amusing joke, for which the Jews provide the occasion. For Horace the poet, the Jews are conveniently available, however awkward they are for Horace the character.

* * *

There are three references to the Jews in Horace's first book of *Satires*. Not, perhaps, in itself a remarkable fact, but well over the average for an Augustan poetry book. Propertius, for instance, has none. One of the most recent books on Horace, J.K. Newman's *Horace as Outsider*, has resuscitated, tentatively, the theory that Horace was of Jewish origin⁹. It is a theory that leans partially on these references in *Satires* 1 and partially on the attested Jewish community in Venusia, Horace's birthplace; two Jewish cemeteries have been discovered there, though they date to a period later than Horace's lifetime. The theory of

⁶ SCHAEFER, *Judaophobia*, 96-105 describes Roman attitudes to circumcision.

⁷ L. FELDMAN (*The Enigma of Horace's thirtieth Sabbath*, "SCI" 10, 1989-1990, 87-112) surveys the possible referents, assuming that Fuscus is not making it up.

⁸ On Roman attitudes to the Sabbath, see SCHAEFER, *Judaophobia*, 82-89.

⁹ J.K. NEWMAN, *Horace as Outsider*, Zürich 2011, 446-458.

Horace's Jewish origins, which dates back to an article of Guglielmo Braun, published in 1878, was most significantly argued by Ettore Ciccotti, who died in 1938, and whose last work was *Le Origini di Orazio (e la questione ebraica)*¹⁰. Clearly intended as a rebuke to Fascist racial policies, it was not published until 1945. I am not going to pursue this argument one way or the other (though I am skeptical that these references constitute a reason to believe that Horace was Jewish). Rather, I want to consider the use to which Horace puts the presence of the Jews in his first book of *Satires*.

I will argue that there is a coherence to these three references to Jews in Horace's book, and that they give us the opportunity to examine an orientalist discourse of some complexity. The three passages begin to look more like a group when we consider that all of them come at or near the end of their respective satires (*Satires* 4, 5 and 9). This closural role is clearly marked in the first of these passages, which constitutes the final line of *Satire* 4, Horace's apologia for the genre of satire. In this satire, Horace addresses common perceptions of the genre as malicious. If his humour is a little free, he says, he deserves indulgence for this, because his father educated him by example, and so his satire too teaches by example. Perhaps this educational method has not left Horace without faults, but he is working on them:

*ubi quid datur oti
illudo chartis. hoc est mediocribus illis
ex vitis unum; cui si concedere nolis,
multa poetarum veniat manus auxilio quae
sit mihi (nam multo plures sumus), ac veluti te
Iudaei cogemus in banc concedere turbam.*

When I have spare time
I scribble. That is one of those venial faults
Of mine; and if you refuse to indulge it
A great band of poets would come to my aid,
(For we're in the clear majority), and, like
the Jews, we'll force you to join our gang.

(*Serm.* 1,4,137-142)

The enjambement of *Iudaei*, and its postponement from its natural place after *veluti*, give the word considerable emphasis, and with this surprise turn to the exotic other Horace nails into place his paradoxical image of a gang of

¹⁰ G. BRAUN, *La originaria nazionalità di Orazio*, "Archeografo Triestino" 5 (1877-1878), 247-282; E. CICCOTTI *Le Origini di Orazio (e la questione ebraica)*, Rionero 1990. Also, W. ALEXANDER, *The Enigma of Horace's Mother*, "CPh" 37 (1942), 385-397.

bullying poets, making, as Gowers puts it “a mock return to the atavistic aggression of earlier satire”¹¹. So, poets are like Jews. Not a bad way of expressing the power of a small, cohesive minority to whom a special kind of license (poetic, religious) is, or should be, accorded. Ironically, earlier in the satire Horace had excluded himself from the category of poet (*excerpam numero*, 40) on the basis that what he writes is more like prose than verse. Now, at least according to the usual interpretation of the final lines, he is threatening to force others to join his band. We will return to this passage later.

Moving on to the end of the next poem, we find that poets are *not* like Jews, or at any rate this poet isn't. *Satire* 1,5 is Horace's well-known account of a journey to Brundisium in the company of Virgil and Maecenas. Towards the end of Horace's narrative he tells us of the tourist attraction at Egnatia, where incense catches fire without flame:

dein Gnatia Lymphis
iratis exstructa dedit risusque iocosque,
dum flamma sine tura liquescere limine sacro
persuadere cupit. credat Iudaeus Apella,
non ego: namque deos didici securum agere aevum,
nec si quid miri faciat natura, deos id
tristis ex alto caeli demittere tecto.
Brundisium longae finis chartaeque viaeque est.

Then Gnatia, built with the Nymphs'
 Disapproval gave cause for laughter and jokes:
 Incense melts without fire on the sacred threshold,
 It would have us believe! Let Apella the Jew believe that,
 Not me: for I've learned that the gods lead a life without care,
 And that if nature produces wonders, it doesn't mean the gods
 Are sending angry messages from their high home in the sky.
 Brundisium is the end of the journey and the poem, both long.

(*Serm.* 1,5,97-104)

The superstition of the Jews was a common element of the stereotype¹². Apella the Jew may be credulous enough to believe the local myths of Italy, but Horace stands outside the confines of traditional piety, convinced by the arguments of the Epicureans, or more specifically Lucretius, whom he quotes directly at this point (*nam bene qui didicere deos securum agere aevum, De Rerum Natura* 5,82; 6,58; 2,646-651). Horace cites the credulity of Apella the

¹¹ E. GOWERS, *Horace: Satires, Book 1*, Cambridge 2012, 181.

¹² Gowers cites Ovid, *AA* 1,76; Persius 5,179-188; Juvenal 14,96-106; Rutilius Namatianus 1,387-394.

Jew to turn traditional Roman piety into something strange and exotic, from which the poet stands aloof, like the Epicurean gods themselves¹³. He mitigates his own rejection of Italian piety by associating that piety with something foreign and gullible. Again, the Jews serve to locate Horace the poet at an oblique angle to his native culture: a member of the pressure group of poets in 1,4, he is now an impious Epicurean, *by contrast* with Apella the Jew.

Our final passage is the exchange with Fuscus in 1,9 with which I started. If in the previous two passages it is Horace's own persona that cites the Jews to make a witty point, here it is Horace's friend who has recourse to Jewish religious practice in order to play a practical joke on the narrator of this anecdote. The speaking voice of the poem is victimized by a reference to the Jews whom he had so confidently and wittily manipulated for his own purposes in the two previous passages, and this reversal is the variation which brings the little sequence of three to a close. As in 1,5, the religious position of the Jews is associated with superstitious weakness (*sum paulo infirmior*, 1,9,71) though, as in 1,4, the association aligns the speaker with a multitude (*unus multorum*, 1,9,71-72).

These three passages, each at approximately the same point in their satire, constitute a running joke in Horace's first book of *Satires*. If I might be permitted an English reference point, I would compare the Monty Python episode in which the agents of the Spanish Inquisition burst in on sketch after sketch with the words "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition". The cumulative effect is funny, absurd, and a little sinister, reminding us that the individual episodes can go anywhere, introduce anyone, and interrupt anything, without warning – like the Spanish Inquisition. Horace's Jews do not have the same comic malevolence, but I would say that their repeated and unexpected appearance towards the end of a poem displays the poet's sovereign right to take that poem in any direction he likes. It is no coincidence that the first of these references compares poets to Jews in respect of their ability to compel others to agree with them. When is a minority powerful? When it is on familiar territory. In the *Pro Flacco* Cicero complains that the prosecution has held the trial of Flaccus on the Aurelian steps where it will be vulnerable to "that crowd" (*illa turba*). Horace's emphatically closural closing line in *Satires* 1,4 reminds us that we are in a poem, which makes his statement that the poets will compel us that much more plausible. Reasoned argument is abandoned and we are confronted with the epigrammatic surprise of poetic closure – how can we resist? The inconvenient presence of the Jews is pulled out of the conjuror's hat as a final surprise and aligned with the poet's power to define his own world.

¹³ Apella's name is a pun, alluding to circumcision (*a-*, 'without', and *pellis*, 'skin') (V. PISANI, *Apella*, "Paideia" 8, 1953, 8).

On the fictional level of these satires the Jews become an unpredictable presence that cannot be ignored. Was Horace thinking of Cicero's cohesive and coercive Jewish crowd, so threatening to his case in the *Pro Flacco*, written some twenty years earlier? The connection has been made by John Nolland, who argues that the words *in hanc concedere turbam* are not a reference to Jewish proselytizing, as they are often taken to be ("we will compel you to join this crowd"), but to the kind of influence that Cicero attributes to the Jews at *contiones*¹⁴. So, for Nolland, *in hanc concedere turbam* means not "to make your way into our throng (ie convert)" but "to agree to the policy of this crowd", or, keeping the same meaning for *concedere* as in line 140, "to be indulgent with respect to this crowd" (more dubious, in view of the absolute use required of *concedere*). Whatever one thinks of Nolland's interpretation, the repetition of *concedere* is significant. Horace acknowledges a weakness that he wants us to indulge (*cui si concedere nolis...*, 140) and the final comparison of the poets to the Jews might refer to a similar indulgence, the kind that is represented by Fuscus' pretended respect for superstitions about the Sabbath in *Satires* 1,9, or the indulgence towards the religious practice of the Jews exercised by the imperial power. The word brings together the quirks of two minorities, poets and Jews. But there is considerable tension between the words *cogemus* (we will compel you) and *concedere*. This combination of weakness and aggression looks forward to Fuscus' show of respect for the Jews as he sidesteps the poet's desperate appeal: Horace must indulge him for being *paulo infirmior* whether he likes it or not.

Cumulatively, I would suggest, these passages from Horace's first book of *Satires* amount to an engagement with the Jewish presence at Rome that is quite distinct from the casual references to the Sabbath or circumcision in the love poets and others. Clearly Horace plays out quite a complex drama of identification and separation, of sameness and difference, power and weakness, group and individual, through this sequence. Having associated poets with Jews in 1,4, in the next satire he foists Italian superstition onto Apella the Jew, who is gullible enough to believe Egnatia's story of incense burning without flame. Apella the Jew now *contrasts* with the poet (*non ego*, 1,5,101). Dissociating himself from this superstitious foreigner, Horace, as I have suggested, makes his own potentially impious sceptical Epicureanism more familiar, less strange, by virtue of the contrast. Looked at another way, compared to Horace the intellectual, Apella the Jew and the inhabitants of Egnatia might appear quite similar in their gullibility. The exotic and the native are fused. It is no coincidence, I think, that after this ending to Satire 5 Horace begins the next satire by hailing Maecenas as one of the Lydians who settled in Etruria.

¹⁴ J. NOLLAND, *Proselytism or Politics in Horace Satires I,4,138-143?*, "VChr" 33 (1979), 347-355.

*Non quia, Maecenas, Lydorum quidquid Etruscos
incoluit fines nemo generosior est te...*

Not, Maecenas, because, among all the Lydians
who have settled in Etruscan territory none is more noble than you...

(*Serm.* 1,6,1-2)

The Lydians are another oriental people who have a presence at Rome, or at any rate in Roman history, and who confound the possibility of mapping the contrast between east and west onto that between them and us. Maecenas' descent from Lydians is no impediment to his *generositas*, and possibly even enhances it by virtue of the antiquity of the connection.

To sum up, I would suggest the following. In this little sequence from Horace's *Satires* Book 1, the Jews appear through familiar, orientaling stereotypes. So much is clear if we take the passages or characterizations individually and look for parallels in other authors. But if we consider the references as a group, and in their contexts, a more complicated picture emerges. The model that I would propose is not so much a polar "us and them" as what I would call "identification under erasure", which is what we see in Augustus' mock observance of the Sabbath. Horace the poet, the Egnatians, and Fuscus the false friend, are all identified, or identify themselves, with the Jews, but facetiously or disingenuously. There is something opportunistic about each of these surprise appearances. The Jews are *available* to the Roman, to be pulled out of the hat whenever it is convenient; but at the same time the references to Jews serve to emphasize something eccentric about poetry and poets. And the third time the poet has recourse to the Jews it is as though something must be paid back in return for the borrowings. Fuscus' arrival is not as opportune as Horace would have it, and neither is the appearance of the Jews, for Fuscus uses the Sabbath as an opportunity for a practical joke at the expense of his friend. If the Jews are a figure for the aggressive power of the poets in 1,4, here they are a minority who, inconveniently, claim his respect.

A poem by an earlier poet, in which the poet-narrator tells of his discomfiture at the hands of someone who brings up an oriental practice, comes to mind in connection with *Satires* 1,9. In poem 10 of Catullus, a nameless *puella* exposes the poet's imperial boast, and lie, that he has acquired eight strong litter-bearers on his tour of duty in Bithynia. She asks him to lend her the imaginary litter-bearers so that she can go to the temple of Serapis. Her request is as awkward as Fuscus' profession of respect for the Sabbath. One might say of *Satires* 1 that, once they have been installed in the discourse, the Jews prove to be an unruly presence, demanding an uncomfortable stretch of the imagination and the sympathies. In *Satires* 1,8, Horace has a statue of

Priapus recount how he dispelled the threatening witches Canidia and Sagana with a fart, bringing the satire to an end with a laugh. But at the end of *Satires* 1,9 farting (*oppedere*, 70) is a figure for the disrespect that is, however disingenuously, forbidden to the imperial subject.

Satires 1,9 continues a little beyond the moment in which Fuscus abandons Horace to the Bore, and the poem is brought to a close with the poet's deliverance. The Bore is finally hauled off to court with Horace as a witness. In the final words of the satire, Horace facetiously claims that he has been saved by Apollo, god of poets: *sic me servavit Apollo* (1,9,78). Commentators duly cite the Homeric intertext (*Iliad* 20,443) and the fact that Lucilius made the same Homeric citation (Warmington 267-268). But there is also an intra-text for this ending, which is noted by the most recent commentator on this book, Gowers (2012). *Sic me servavit Apollo* echoes, in rhythm, sound and metrical sedes, the words *credat Iudaeus Apella* at the end of *Satire* 5 (100): Apella / Apollo¹⁵. Horace's claim to have been saved by Apollo is, of course, a joke and, as we have been told at the end of *Satire* 5, Horace doesn't believe in divine providence or intervention. This Apollo, in fact, is the sort of god Apella would believe in. Which is to say that the mythological armature of poetic convention is like the religious scruples of Roman Jews: it imposes certain obligations on the poet and is adopted with a detached non-belief¹⁶. Horace's surprise, disingenuous recourse to Apollo at the end of 1,9 is made, by association with the superstitious Apella, to look like the facetious Judaizing of Augustus, or of Horace's inconvenient friend Aristius Fuscus. For Horace, the Jewish presence at Rome allows the imperial subject to imagine and dramatize the process of stepping back from his *own* culture. But what I would finally emphasize about this little sequence of surprise closural appearances of the Jews is that they are not isolated references, but must be taken as a group. In other words, the Jews have a poetic *presence* in this book that works in a complex but systematic way, and no other ethnic group could do the job.

¹⁵ Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 6, even derives Apollo from *apella*. See FELDMAN, *Jew...*, 511, n. 111.

¹⁶ GOWERS (*Horace*, 304) sees this differently: "Final Apollo displaces the similar line-ending Apella (5.100), sending the Jews (and H.'s agnosticism) packing in favour of Roman religious protection".