

## Notes on Horace

By the time Horace was in his teens Pompey and Caesar were engaged in a civil war.

Main source of his biography: his own writings and a short biography written by Suetonius (born c. 69 CE) in the *de poetis* section of his *de viris illustribus*, a collection of biographies of Roman literary figures.

Born: 8 December 65 BCE in Venusia (modern Venosa), on the border of Lucania and Apulia in southern Italy.

[https://maps.google.com/maps?q=venosa&safe=off&ie=UTF-8&ei=B46JUrGxGs\\_MsQSnuoC4Aw&ved=0CAoQ\\_AUoAg](https://maps.google.com/maps?q=venosa&safe=off&ie=UTF-8&ei=B46JUrGxGs_MsQSnuoC4Aw&ved=0CAoQ_AUoAg)

Horace was the son of a freedman, or ex-slave, who worked as an auction agent or coactor argentarius.

Father probably enslaved during the Social Wars (91-88 BCE) in which the town of Venusia was taken by the Romans.

His father provided him with an education typical of families of the equestrian or senatorial class.

- he brought him to Rome for his education
- he studied, among other things, the poetry of Livius Andronicus, an early Latin writer and Homer
- Studies philosophy at Athens
- He, along with Cicero's son, who was also studying in Athens, joined the Republican faction, under Marcus Brutus, in the civil war that followed the assassination of Caesar in 48 BCE
- he was appointed tribunos militum or military tribune under Brutus
- This granted him equestrian status
- He fought on the losing side at the Battle of Philippi, 42 BCE.

Pardoned by the victors, Horace returned to Italy. His paternal home and estate was confiscated by the victorious soldiers so Horace found himself in relative poverty.

He was still able to purchase for himself the position of scriba quaestorius, clerk to the quaestors who were in charge of the public treasure.

- it was an important position and was for life
- duties were public finances and public records
- This is a typical job for those who prepared, as he had done, by his studies.
- The job only required intermittent work, yet always brought in a salary
- this was a perfect situation for a poet.

By early 30s BCE Horace was probably sharing his writings with others

He became friends with the poets Virgil and Varius (cf. Satire I.9), who in turn introduced him to

Gaius Cilnius Maecenas.

- Maecenas introduced Horace to become part of his group of friends, which included several famous poets.
- Maecenas was a very wealthy equestrian, from Etruria,
- He served as an important adviser to Octavian until the late 20s BCE
- It was through Maecenas that Horace became connected with Augustus
- The relationship between Maecenas and Horace was based on mutual respect and friendship in addition to artistic support.
- Horace received a Sabine farm, his country home which he valued greatly. It may or may not have been a gift from Maecenas.

“Maecenas’ significance to Horace, however, is indisputable, and one sign of this is the fact that the first poem of Horace’s initial lyric collection (*Odes*, Books 1-3) is addressed to Maecenas as are the beginning poems of the *Epodes*, *Satires* Book 1, and *Epistles* Book 1. (Ancona, xv.)

Little is known of Horace’s later life.

He did accept Augustus’ commission to write the *carmen saeculare*, but graciously turned down a request by Augustus to serve as his personal secretary.

He died on 27 November 8 BCE, shortly after the death of Maecenas.

## **Horace’s Writings**

His literary career extended for about 30 years.

1<sup>st</sup> publication in 35 BCE was Book 1 of *Satires* or *Sermones* (conversations)

40 BCE: Book 2.

His 18 Satires follow tradition of Lucilius (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE) whom Horace calls the founder of Latin satire, *Satura*, considered original to the Romans.

Latin satire is vers in a conversational style on a variety of topics, written from an individual point of view.

Other Latin Satirists: Persius (1<sup>st</sup> century CE) and Juvenal (1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE).

Horace tried to write more sophisticated than Lucius' satires.

Lyric poetry means poetry written in the meters used by the Greek lyric poets: Alcaeus, Sappho, Anacreon, Alcman, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, Pindar, and Bacchylides.

While Catullus, a generation earlier, had used Greek meter, Horace prided himself for being the first poet to do so on a large scale.

Sappho and Alcaeus were his most important models.

Horace, like Catullus, was also influenced by the Alexandrian aesthetics of Callimachus (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE), the Hellenistic Greek poet who described his Muse as 'slender,' a term that Horace uses for his own muse as well.

These literary aesthetics placed a high value on the small, learned, carefully wrought poem.

Horace lyrics are different than those of earlier Latin poets.

- Word order, which in Latin is already quite flexible, is with Horace even more so.
- Words that agree with each other may be separated widely, creating a kind of framing or phrasing effect, which words right next to each may not agree with each other grammatically, but may affect each other in terms of sense. (xvii)