

HORACE, THE LIAR PERSONA AND THE POETRY OF DISSIMULATIO: THE CASE OF *EPISTLES 1*

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In this paper I examine Horace's *Epistles 1* and argue that Horace constructed the main speaker of this collection as a duplicitous 'liar persona'. Horace's *persona* of *Epistles 1* admits that his past relationship with his patron Maecenas was paramount to slavery and appears determined to restore himself to freedom. Nevertheless, Horace employs various strategies to make us question the sincerity of his *persona's* resolve and to suspect we may be being addressed by a slave dissimulating as a free man. Furthermore, Horace seems to have implicated the *Epistles* as a whole in this pretence; they are poems written to a patron's demand but 'pose' as his personal letters. I argue that Horace created this poetic dynamic, the liar *persona* in his false letters, in order to 'unmask' himself and disclose his real view of the nature of his relationship with Maecenas.

I

Book 1 of the *Epistles* consists of 20 poems in the guise of letters in which Horace professes a desire to abandon his public role to recover his spiritual, physical and moral health and, most importantly, his freedom. The *Epistles* were written after the publication of *Sermones* (1, 2) and *Odes* (1-3), most likely in 20 or 19 BC, by which time Horace had been *amicus* of Maecenas for some fifteen years and in possession of his famous Sabine farm for about ten.¹ *Epistles 1* are often seen as related to *Sermones* in that they both use the same metre (dactylic hexameter) to present similar personal, social and philosophical concerns while differing in the way they handle the sensitive issue of the nature of Horace's relationship with his patron Maecenas. In *Epistles 1*, Horace expresses his yearning to restore himself to freedom, to loosen the ties of patronage that bind him to his patron, but in striking such a pose Horace demolishes the credibility of the self-portrayal in his earlier poetry, most notably in the *Sermones*. The 'Horace' of *Sermones* insisted that his relationship with his patrons was 'free' and 'true' *amicitia*, a close egalitarian friendship, based on sentiment and moral equality rather than on gifts and favours.²

¹ See e.g. Bowditch 2001:162.

² Horace refers to himself and those he celebrates as *amici* ('friends'), implying that his relationship with these men was based primarily on sentiment, *Od.* 2.6.24, 3.8.13; *Serm.* 1.6, 1.9, 1.10.85-7; *Epist.* 1.9.5. Konstan 1995:329 observed that '*Amicus* ... means only "friend" and does not mean client at all'. See also Williams 1994:395;

On the other hand, in the opening lines of *Epistle* 1, Horace addresses Maecenas and refers to his clientage by utilising a metaphor drawn from the career of a slave, a gladiator (1.1-4)³:

*Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende Camena,
spectatum satis et donatum iam rude quaeris,
Maecenas, iterum antiquo me includere ludo?
non eadem est aetas, non mens.*

You of whom my earliest Muse has told, of whom my last shall tell,
you Maecenas, seek to shut me up again in my old gladiatorial
school, though well tested in the fray, and already presented with the
wooden sword.

The gladiator: ‘crude, loathsome, doomed, lost (*importunus, obscaenus, damnatus, perditus*), was throughout Roman tradition a man utterly debased by fortune, a slave, a man altogether without worth and dignity (*dignitas*), almost without humanity’.⁴ By utilising such an image, Horace clearly casts his relationship with Maecenas in an entirely different mould from that found in *Sermones*. By claiming to have sufficiently compensated his master, having earned his ‘wooden sword’ (*rude*) — the sign of a job well done and the guarantor of freedom — Horace ‘exposes’ his relationship with Maecenas as one of the most despised, a relationship based on *utilitas* rather than on *virtus*.⁵ Immediately below, in line 8, Horace reinforces the image of the gladiator with that of an overworked animal and compares himself to an old horse (*senescentem ... equum*, 8). In the lines that follow, the metaphor continues, albeit in somewhat modified form: Horace alludes to a cheated lover, a boy under the care of his mother, and a labourer (20-23). All of them are dependants, subject to others, and slavery still looms large. The cheated lover recalls the theme of the ‘slavery to love’ (*servitium amoris*) often encountered in the elegists of the Augustan period,⁶ and several sources speak of

White 2007:195-206. For the view that *amicitia* was straddling both the world of friendship and the social and economic ‘network’ relationship, see Saller 1982; Verboven 2001.

³ The English translations of *Epistles* are taken from Fairclough 1966.

⁴ Barton 1993:1.

⁵ This metaphor became popular with later poets, among others, *Ov. Tr.* 4.8.24.

⁶ As a number of scholars have observed, the language of the *servitium amoris* (slavery of love) featured by the elegists of the Augustan period overlaps with the language of patronage, Fitzgerald 2000:72; White 1993:87-91.

the labourer's existence as slavish, in that the labourer is merely a tool in someone else's hands.⁷

Of course, the problems of gauging Horace's tone and the levels of irony in the *Epistles* are numerous and the text itself rarely provides reliable clues on which to base our decisions regarding which of Horace's *personae* to trust, if any, and when. Such decisions are usually based on preconceived notions of Horace and his position in society. For example, earlier generations of critics considered Horace's self-portrayal in *Sermones* as quite trustworthy and therefore as sufficient proof that the historical Horace maintained his freedom in the face of power.⁸ Thus these critics were more likely to regard the 'admission' of *Epistles* as an ironic metaphor. Nowadays, scholars are more likely to question *Sermones*' *persona*'s claims and assert that the Horace of *Sermones* is a product of the author's 'image management' program. Lyne, for example, argued that in *Sermones* Horace was protecting his public image in order to prevent his audience from developing the 'wrong' perception of him. He was dealing, Lyne argues, with his 'personal embarrassments': one arising from the fact that he had come to endorse the regime that defeated the Republican cause he himself had fought for in 42 BC, and another from the potential suggestion that he had become a turncoat in return for money and gifts.⁹ As he was open to the charge of being Maecenas's parasitic hanger-on (*scurra*), Horace chose to cloak his dependency in images of friendly camaraderie and thus constructed an alternative and more attractive version of himself in his poetry.¹⁰ To DuQuesnay such image management was calculated to soothe the fears of Horace's contemporaries in regards to the character and intentions of Maecenas and Octavian,¹¹ while McNeill notices that such self-representation would have created the impression that Horace endorsed the regime freely and independently

⁷ For example, Heraclides Ponticus stated, 'Enjoyment and good living are reserved for free men, for this exalts and enhances the spirit. Labouring, on the other hand, is for slaves, and that is why their character deteriorates', Athen. 12, 512a. According to Aristotle, one should not work for another lest he enslaves himself by becoming a tool in someone else's hands: 'it is the condition of a free man not to live for the benefit of others', *Rhet.* 1367a 32-33; Vogt 1974:13.

⁸ For a good overview of the biographical tradition of criticism of Horace, see Harrison 1995:4-6.

⁹ Lyne 1995:13-20.

¹⁰ Some of Horace's contemporaries have thought it perfectly fitting to interpret his relationship with Maecenas in everyday terms of a dependent client doing the bidding of his master, *Serm.* 1.6.45-48. See also Damon 1997:17, 24, 127.

¹¹ As DuQuesnay 1984:34, 31, 57 observes: 'The image of Maecenas's friends which emerges from the poems is ... so exactly calculated to allay the fears and anxieties of Horace's contemporaries about the intentions, ambitions, and moral character of their new leaders, that is just not possible to suppose that the effect is accidental'.

and thus bestowed on his poetry a propaganda value it would otherwise not have had.¹²

If this is indeed so, the question we have to ask is why Horace would jeopardise this whole ideological project in *Epistles* and openly suggest that his existence as Maecenas's client was paramount to slavery. We are certainly still at liberty to regard this whole 'admission' as a humorously extreme depiction of Roman patronal relations, but below I will opt for a more literal reading, primarily because of an extremely interesting poetic dynamic Horace created in *Epistles*. I have dubbed *Epistles* as 'poetry of *dissimulatio*' for two reasons: firstly, because I believe that Horace constructed their main speaker as a duplicitous 'liar *persona*', a dissimulating slave to which we may also refer to as 'Davus's Horace'. Several years ago, Johnson noticed that in the opening lines of *Epistles 1* Horace in fact concedes fully and irrevocably the famous accusation levelled at him in the second book of *Sermones* by his slave Davus.¹³ The poem in which this accusation appears (*Sat.* 2.7) is set in Rome during the Saturnalia, when it was customary to allow slaves to speak their minds freely, and Horace's slave Davus uses the occasion to charge Horace with the vice of inconsistency.¹⁴ As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that in Davus's eyes this inconsistency is a symptom of Horace's underlying moral slavery, which Davus also regards as the cause of Horace's literal enslavement to his patron Maecenas. If not invited out by Maecenas, Davus claims, Horace poses as a self-sufficient sage praising his frugal meal, but once he receives an invitation, he runs to Maecenas like he is being chased (2.7.23-45). What this shows, Davus claims, is that Horace is a slave who, as it happens, owns one too (79-80): 'Why you who lord it over me, are the wretched slave of another master, and you are moved like a wooden puppet by wires that others pull. Who then is

¹² McNeill 2001:6, 92-110 argues that Horace's endorsement of the Augustan regime in his seemingly un-political *Sermones* constitutes 'true' sociological propaganda, or that which Jacques Ellul 1965:4 has termed the 'propaganda of integration'. McNeill suggested that Horace delivered the ideological message of his masters as personal views on moral and social issues and, at the same time created a note of apparent personal distance, diverging occasionally from the party line as a way of delineating for himself a self-image as an 'independent commentator' on Augustus and his regime. See also Foulkes 1983:107.

¹³ Johnson 1993:5 observes that in *Epistles 1*, the Horatian *personae* say the same things Davus had said, 'more calmly and less savagely but as relentlessly and at times as incisively as Davus had said them'.

¹⁴ Consistency was a virtue commonly discussed in Stoic texts and it involved an unwavering commitment to one's professed moral principles, knowing who you were and staying that regardless of any dangers or temptations. This Stoic virtue preoccupied Horace quite a bit and the *Epistles* are permeated with passages dealing with this theme. See McGann 1969:13; Oliensis 1998:6; Rudd 1966:138.

free?’¹⁵ A few lines earlier, Davus compared Horace to the parasite Mulvius, but said that Mulvius is a better man because he is honest about what and who he is (37-43):

‘*Etenim fateor me*’, *dixerit ille,*
‘duci ventre levem, nasum nidore supinor.
imbecillus, iners, si quid vis, adde popino.
tu cum sis quod ego et fortassis nequior, ultro
insectere velut melior verbisque decoris
obvolvas vitium?’ ‘quid, si me stultior ipso
quingentis empto drachmis deprenderis?’

‘Yes’, he (Mulvius) would say, ‘tis true that I’m a fickle creature, led by my stomach. I curl up my nose for a savoury smell. I’m weak, lazy and if you like to add, a toper. But you since you are just the same and maybe worse, would you presume to assail me, as though you were better man, and would you throw over your own vices a cloak of seemly words?’... ‘What if you are found to be a greater fool than even I, who cost you five hundred drachmas?’

Davus, therefore, explicitly attacks Horace’s ‘free *amicus*’ *persona*, suggesting that this *persona* is nothing more than a cloak of ‘seemly words’ (*verbis ... decoris*, 2.7.41), an external mask covering the parasite beneath. It is this dishonesty, perhaps his self-deceit, which makes Horace, in Davus’s eyes, ‘a slave many times over’ (*totiens servus*, 2.7.70).¹⁶ At this point, Horace’s *persona* does not conceal its unease with Davus’s words, resorting to a threat of force (116-121), but in *Epistles*, as we saw, we witness a striking change of tone as Horace’s *persona* recalls and openly admits every single aspect of Davus’s accusation.

I do not argue that the admission of *Epistle* 1 makes Horace’s epistolary *persona* into ‘Davus’s Horace’, but rather that its continued deception does so. Horace’s ‘liar *persona*’ is ‘honest’ in that it concedes Davus’s point and admits to its enslaved past, but nevertheless deceptive in that it falsely claims a clear break

¹⁵ *Nempe tu, mihi qui imperitas, alii servis miser atque duceris ut nervis alienis mobile lignum. Quisnam igitur liber?*

¹⁶ When parasites feature in the ancient plays, the parallels between them (ostensibly free men) and slaves (legally bound) are evident to the audience but not to the parasites, who even boast of their position. See Damon 1997:33; Bernstein 1987:37-61, 50-51. On the other hand, such an accusation may be unfair given that Horace admitted to some of his ‘crimes’ in earlier satires, thus pre-empting much of the blame Davus tries to attach to him. For other ways in which Davus’ arguments are weakened, see Sharland 2010:261-316, 289-292.

from it. Horace, I will argue, allows us to see this deception; on the surface, he asks his readership to accept his *persona*'s overt claims that there is a clear break between his present freedom and past slavery, but he employs various strategies in order to ultimately 'expose' these claims as that which Davus labelled 'seemly words'.

Although I will not read *Epistles* as straight autobiographical documents but will instead examine Horace's manipulation of his various *personae*, his poetic 'deceptions' and ways of obscuring the line between the real and the fictitious in life and literature, I will argue that *Epistles* are indeed concerned with the truth of the matter. I hold that Horace's 'exposing' of his *persona*'s deceptions does in fact represent his disclosure of his *real* view on the nature of his relationship with his patron rather than, for example, a poetic problematicising of the issue, a stimulus for (misguided?) attempts to reach the man behind the poetic *personae*. I am well aware, of course, that the Horace of *Epistles* might be stripping away one mask only to present us with another, that in poetry the author's *dissimulatio*, in one form or another, never really ends, but I have opted against such a view due to two curious and unique features of *Epistles*.

The first feature is also the second reason for my labelling the *Epistles* as poetry of *dissimulatio*, namely, my belief that Horace made this whole genre complicit in his *persona*'s pretence. The *Epistles* are poems posing as letters and this pose I believe, is an inseparable part of its main *persona*'s *dissimulatio*. In the final poem, *Epistle* 20, Horace casts the whole of Book 1 in the figure of a slave and thus, I will argue, ends the *dissimulatio* of both the book and its main *persona*, the two entities he separates in this poem.¹⁷ The reason Horace separated his epistolary *persona* from the book of poetry has to do, I will argue, with Horace's intention to allow the reader insights into the man behind the poetic *persona*. He portrays Book 1 and its *persona* as separate entities in order to remind us of a simple truth: the historical author can always disassociate himself from his poetic *persona* but he can *never* disassociate himself from his poetry. The poetry will always be traced back to him. The second reason for my identifying the 'liar *persona*' with the historical author is the all-encompassing nature of this *persona*. Unlike any other, this *persona* transcends the genre it originally appeared in and affects all of Horace's poetic *personae*, past, present and future. It claims that Horace's past *personae* are the masks of a dissimulator while exposing itself as such, and then it projects its claims into the future by announcing the continuation of Horace's poetic career in unaltered terms. This *persona*, I will argue, is the only one Horace could never shed once he assumed it.

¹⁷ On the literary precedents of this poem, see Kiessling & Heinze 1959:190.

II

Whilst the autobiographical slant of Horace's works in general tends to direct his gaze inwards, this appears to be particularly true of *Epistles*. In *Epistles I*, Horace expresses to Maecenas his desire to search for the 'true' and 'appropriate': 'So now I lay my verses down, and all my other games, to study what is true and appropriate, totally involved in that' (*nunc itaque et versus et cetera ludicra pono / quid verum atque decens, curo et rogo et omnis in hoc sum*, 10-12). *Decens* is recognised to be Horace's rendering of Panaetius's *decorum*, which signified an 'an outer face of virtue', a consistent performance of one's primary role as a human being, in accordance with one's rational human nature, one's individual nature, circumstances, station in life and so on.¹⁸ The achievement of *decorum* depended on intense self-scrutiny and self-knowledge and an epistle appears to be a well-chosen medium for such a project.¹⁹ Until relatively recently, critics have focused their attention on the issue of whether or not the *Epistles* were real letters: older commentators would regard the *Epistles* as personal communication between Horace and his addressees, while in recent years, scholars generally accept their fictional and poetic nature.²⁰ Nevertheless, part of the answer as to why Horace chose to cast his poetry in the form of letters, as Mayer has observed, had to do with his professed intention to pursue a program of self-revelation.²¹ The ancients regarded the letter as normal speech in a written medium and would often define it as one half of a dialogue, or a surrogate to actual dialogue,²² as well as recognise it as a particularly personal form, as an 'ego document' that expresses the character and personality of its writer particularly clearly.²³ By announcing his project of

¹⁸ The term *decens*, as McGann 1969:41 has observed, can at this time only point to the ethics of Panaetius and to what Cicero chose to render as *decorum*. For *decorum* in Cicero see *Off.* 1.13-14, 94-98, 107, 110-111, 113-114; 120; 125; Mitchell 1991:35; De Lacy 1977:165; Gill 1988:191-192.

¹⁹ In Cicero and Panaetius, the achievement of *decorum* is very much connected with self-knowledge; they thought that men should know themselves and act in accordance with that knowledge, using their own nature as a yardstick by which to judge the appropriateness of a contemplated pursuit. For epistolary self-search, see Edwards 1997:24; Mayer 1994:2; Stowers 1986:39.

²⁰ For a summary of views, see Mayer 1994:3; Bowditch 2001:164.

²¹ '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 the program of self-revelation', Mayer 1994:4.

²² *Dem. Eloc.* 223; *Cic. Fam.* 2.4.1, 12.30.1; *Att.* 8, 14.1, 9; *Sen. Epist.* 75; *Lib.* 2.58.

²³ *Dem. Eloc.* 227: 'The letter, like the dialogue, should abound in glimpses of character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but none so clearly as in the

self-discovery in the first epistle, therefore, which the reader will supposedly be able to trace in the collection of 'letters' that follow, Horace explicitly and implicitly 'promises' that he will end all the intentional and unintentional deceptions that might have characterised him in the past and provide us instead with an accurate picture of himself as he truly is.²⁴

The opening lines of *Epistle* 1, which 'expose' the falsity of Horace's earlier self-portrayal indeed indicate his serious intent to deliver on this promise, but immediately after we are confronted with a claim which threatens to destroy the credibility of Horace's epistolary *persona*. When Horace writes in a well-crafted *hexameter*, 'So now I lay my verses down, and all my other games, to study what is true and appropriate,' he is in danger of exposing the fictitious nature of this whole project. Some commentators assert that Horace only wishes to say that he is changing genre from the more poetic *Odes* to the more earnest philosophical form of the *Epistles*, as this would be consistent with the contrast already seen in the *Sermones* between *sermo* and 'real' poetry (*Serm.* 1.4.39-44, 2.6.17). Nevertheless, given that Horace frequently uses *versus* in *Sermones* to designate satire,²⁵ the claim that he is abandoning *versus* (*Epistles* 1.10) should be taken to mean all poetry.²⁶ Others have opted for saying that the entire Book 1 of *Epistles* is 'the longest and most involved *recusatio* that the poet ever addressed to Maecenas'.²⁷ Such 'refusals' to write were frequent in Augustan poetry but, as forms of *recusationes*, the *Epistles* are unusual in that they ground their refusal by referring to a past debt made good, rather than by claiming inadequacy to the task, as is typical with this type of poetry.²⁸

Ultimately, the *Epistles* are some form of *recusatio*: despite his apparent refusal to write, Horace was in fact writing and did publish a book of poetry dedicated to Maecenas. In order to understand exactly what form, we would do well to remember that Horace presents his 'refusal' as the first and most crucial step in his quest to restore himself to freedom, to distance himself from his 'enslaved' past. By exposing the insincerity of this refusal, therefore, Horace puts

epistolary'. Cic. *Fam.* 16.16.2, '... you sent me the news in precisely the proper way. All of you was revealed to me in your letter' (*Te totum in litteris vidi*); Stowers 1986:39.

²⁴ Even while accepting that the *Epistles* were not real letters, some scholars tend to regard them as valuable historical documents because they 'scrutinise the pleasures, pains and problems of living against a standard represented by philosophy, and because the author's experience, more than anyone else's, undergoes that examination', Macleod 1979:27.

²⁵ Hor. *Serm.* 1.4.8, 1.10.1, 40-49, 61, 70; McGann 1969:35.

²⁶ See McGann 1969:35; Harrison 1995:51.

²⁷ Traina in Freudenburg 2002:125; Oliensis 1998:155.

²⁸ Bowditch 2001:162.

in doubt this very distance: if writing poetry to order was slavery before, it is slavery still. We are led to suspect, therefore, that the man writing is the same slave he always was. Seen from this angle, then, this unusual form of epistolary *recusatio* starts to appear as a rather typical *dissimulatio* and Horace's epistolary 'free' *persona* is once again in danger of being exposed as a sum of 'seemly words'. Furthermore, Horace's 'refusal' in *Epistles* 1 is not only verbal but taken to the next level in that the poetry he writes is 'masked' by the consistent maintenance and repeated assertion of the framework of an epistolary exchange.²⁹ The author maintains the pretence of writing letters and thus makes this whole genre complicit in his *persona*'s *dissimulatio*. However transparent, the epistolary surface of these poems provides Horace's 'refusal' with some degree of credibility; it 'hides' the poetry and with it, I would argue, the slave *writing* it.

Epistle 20 confirms this suspicion as Horace casts the now complete volume of *Epistles* in the figure of a pretty slave raised in his household but anxious to run away and publish itself. A more detailed treatment of *Epistle* 20 is best left for later, but at this point, we have to acknowledge the need to read Book 1 in light of this poem's revelation. Provided that the *Epistles* are read in order, *Epistle* 20 would reveal to the reader that the book he / she has just finished reading is in some sense a slave and would thus invite a second reading in light of this knowledge. When Horace says the book is a slave, he also designates its primary voice as such; although he maintains the transparent fiction that his *persona* is a separate entity from his book, it is clear that by depriving his poetry of a human *persona*, he also deprives his poetic self of the same. *Epistle* 20 asks the readers to go back and read with an awareness that the primary voice of *Epistles* is a slave and thus to be weary of anything that might suggest otherwise, as that is more than likely a slave's *dissimulatio*. Horace does not rely solely on *Epistle* 20 to justify such a reading since, as I already mentioned, throughout the *Epistles* he continuously undermines the credibility of his epistolary *persona* by other devices. By the time we arrive at *Epistle* 20, we hardly even need its revelation to inform us that in the previous nineteen poems we have been addressed by a dissimulating slave.

We will leave the issue of the slavery of Horace's *persona* aside for a moment, and concentrate on that which testifies to its present freedom. In lines 37-

²⁹ As well as deploying standard formulae of salutation at beginning and end of the letters (eg. 1.8.1, 6.67, 10.1), Horace alludes to prior exchange with his correspondents through answers, requests or complaints (1.12). He also appears to expect answers or visits, and gives and seeks information (1.30, 5.30, 10.49, 15.25). The pretence of a real letter is further kept up by imitating the miscellaneous character of real correspondence, or by jumbling together unrelated topics, see Ferri 2007:122-123; Allen 1970:255-266; Allen 1972:119-133; De Pretis 2004.

42 of the first epistle, Horace states explicitly that the life of philosophical seclusion he has now chosen will liberate him morally and indeed humanise him, as it would humanise the worst of moral slaves or tame the fiercest of wild beasts:

*Invidus, iracundus, iners, vinosus, amator,
nemo adeo ferus est, ut non mitescere possit
si modo culturae patientem commodet aurem.
Virtus est vitium fugere et sapientia prima
stultitia caruisse.*

The slave to envy, anger, sloth, wine, lewdness — no one is so savage a beast that he cannot be tamed, if only he lend to treatment a patient ear. To flee vice is the beginning of virtue, and to have got rid of folly is the beginning of wisdom.

Here we see Horace taking a first step towards *decorum*, recovering his ‘humanity’ by choosing a life of moral contemplation, far removed from the vices of the city.³⁰ By turning in lines 76-93 to the theme of inconsistency, Horace indicates to Maecenas that in Rome and close to him he stands little chance of moral recovery. Inconsistency, we might remember, was the failure singled out by Davus as the chief symptom of Horace’s moral slavery.³¹ In Panaetius and Cicero, the achievement of life-long consistency (*constantia*) was central to *decorum* and Horace professes to aim for it, explicitly stating to Maecenas why he cannot achieve it in Rome (*Epistles* 1.101-105):

*Insanire putas sollemnia me neque rides,
nec medici credis nec curatoris egere
a praetore dati, rerum tutela mearum
cum sis et prave sectum stomacheris ob unguem
de te pendentis, te respicientis amici.*

³⁰ The first general type of *decorum*, Cicero writes, found in moral goodness and is defined as that ‘which harmonises with man’s superiority in those respects in which his nature differs from the rest of animal creation’ (*quod consentaneum sit hominis excellentiae in eo in quo natura eius a reliquis animantibus differat*, *Off.* 1.96).

³¹ In *Epistles*, Horace becomes quite preoccupied with this particular failure and admits being once guilty of it which, from a Stoic point of view, was the first step towards moral health. The refusal to recognise one’s situation clearly, Stoics insisted, is guarantee that one will remain forever a moral slave and continue to live a life of random inconsistency, see Bernstein 1987:54. The *Epistles* are permeated with passages dealing explicitly with this theme; see McGann 1969:13; Oliensis 1998:166; La Penna 1993:180-181. As Rudd 1966:138 has observed, ‘consistency, which in morals involves the integration of the personality ... held a special interest for Horace’.

You think my madness is the usual thing, and neither laugh at me nor deem that I need a physician or a guardian assigned by the court, though you are keeper of my fortunes, and flare up at an ill pared nail of the friend who hangs upon you and looks to you in all.

These lines are a stark contrast to *Sermones* where Maecenas was portrayed as being primarily interested in Horace's moral virtues, which, Horace claimed, was the chief foundation of their friendship.³² Here, on the other hand, we are asked to believe that Maecenas tolerates Horace's vices and that he sees and only cares about his deceptive externals. Furthermore, in *Sermones*, Horace described Maecenas's home as a place of highest moral standards, as a place which is morally 'pure' (*purus*) and suitable for a man of his own moral purity (*Sat.* 1. 9.49).³³ In the passage above, Maecenas's home is a place where immorality is normalised and acceptable, and this forces Horace to leave it behind and instead seek moral health and sanity elsewhere, namely, in the country at his Sabine farm.

The Sabine farm allows Horace a self-renewal of sorts, it 'restores him to himself' (*mihi me reddentis agelli, Epist.* 1.14.1). *Epistle* 16 sketches a picture of the Sabine farm particularly well; it is a refuge for the nourishment of body and soul (1.16.1-16), a place that sufficiently provides for all of Horace's needs. These needs are modest; he is satisfied with a frugal meal and a nap by the stream (1.14.31-36), the simple pleasures which in *Epistle* 5 he wishes to share with his friend Torquatus (1-4).³⁴ In *Epistle* 7, Horace stakes his claim to freedom in particularly strong terms. He expresses to Maecenas his readiness to give him back all his gifts should he start to feel that these are undermining his efforts. In the opening lines, Horace defies Maecenas's wish that he return to Rome (1-13) and then goes on to explore the relationship between *beneficia* and *amicitia* through a

³² In *Satire* 6, for example, Maecenas is described as caring little for the prejudices of the masses who would deny friendship to Horace on account of his servile birth. Maecenas, Horace states, required only that those men who were to be admitted to his friendship be of free birth (*cum referre negas quali sit quisque parente / natus, dum ingenuus*, 1-8) and of right character. In lines 62-71 Maecenas's primary concern is with Horace's moral virtues and on the basis of these, he decides to admit Horace into his circle. See Schlegel 2000:93-119.

³³ 'Through the word *purus*', as Welch 2001:171 observes 'Maecenas's house itself becomes a physical *locus* for the sort of moral excellence Horace acquired from his stern father'.

³⁴ In *Epistle* 10, Horace addresses Fuscus, a lover of city life, and repeats the association of his past life with slavery. He describes his own preference for the country, comparing himself to a temple slave who freed himself, fleeing from a diet of rich food (*liba, mellitae placentae*) to plain bread, a taste of which now guides his attitudes towards worldly things (11-12).

series of exemplary tales dealing with a gift's potential to enslave the recipient. It is sufficient to mention only the first of these stories, the famous tale about a little fox (or shrew mouse) that enters a bin of grain. Having eaten too much of the grain, this fox gets so fat that it is imprisoned by the size of its belly and cannot get out. Horace is aware that this image may potentially apply to him and thus asserts to Maecenas: 'If challenged by this fable, I give up all ... try me, whether I can restore your gifts and cheerfully too' (*hac ego si compellor imagine, cuncta resigno ... inspice si possum donata reponere laetus*, 34, 39).³⁵

While we hardly need a stronger statement of Horace's determination to emancipate himself from his dependency of Maecenas, it does not take long to suspect that something is not quite right with this picture, that our speaker is not all he seems.³⁶ The first clue comes from the fact that in *Epistles* Horace utilised the language of the fable. It is well known that Horace often narrated or alluded to fables in his *Sermones* and *Epistles* to convey a moral lesson. It is also widely recognised that this genre was considered to have been invented by slaves: the fabulist and freedman Phaedrus explained the fables of Aesopus (also a freedman) as being the means by which slaves expressed their point of view under conditions of social, political and legal disenfranchisement and oppression.³⁷ In her recent discussion, Ilaria Marchesi has analysed the role of the fable in satire and argues that the fable performs the role of a 'freed genre' in that it 'situates itself in the same ambiguous cultural space defined by the intersection of freedom and servitude in which Roman society located the freedmen'.³⁸ Because fables were, so to speak, the slave's language, to claim independence from one's servile past through the language of the fable is, Marchesi argues, to preserve the traces of that very past.³⁹

Marchesi has observed Horace's usage of the language of the fable in both *Sermones* and *Epistles*, and she notices a striking difference. In *Sermones*, the literary redeployment of this genre is consistently associated with the direct presence or indirect evocation of slaves. Horace uses fable as a way of

³⁵ See Drexler 1963:26-37.

³⁶ Several scholars have noticed that Horace's apparent determination to restore Maecenas' gifts is somewhat unconvincing, for example, Oliensis 1998:161; Drexler 1963:33.

³⁷ 'Now, why the genre of the fable was discovered. Briefly, I'll explain. Always liable to harm, the slave, not daring to speak outright what he wished, translated his own affections into fables and so eluded censure with made up jestings', Phaed. Book 3 (prologue); Reiss 2003:181. As Fitzgerald 2000:100 observes: 'Slaves appropriated the animal status assigned to them by the official culture of their masters as a position from which to voice their own perspective'.

³⁸ Marchesi 2005:308.

³⁹ Marchesi 2005:308.

acknowledging his father's servile origin as well as to ensure his own disassociation from this status by distancing his *persona* from this language or by counterbalancing its servile undertones.⁴⁰ On the other hand, in *Epistles* Horace's *persona* takes full responsibility for utilising the language of fable and Horace employs no distancing strategies, treating it instead in an increasingly unmediated fashion.⁴¹ Marchesi interprets this as a sign of Horace's growing confidence, of the personal stigma associated with his father's slavery receding deeper into the past,⁴² but I believe we would do well to follow Marchesi's argument to its logical conclusion. In my opinion, the language of fable serves here the function which Marchesi identified as its typical one, to recall the servile past it seeks to repress, and Horace uses it in order to undermine the overt claims to freedom of his epistolary *persona*, to hint that we are being addressed by a dissimulating slave.⁴³

Another reason for thinking that we are witnessing here the slave's *dissimulatio* is the inconsistency of Horace's epistolary *persona*. In some poems, as in those observed above, Horace is a man dedicated to seclusion and philosophical improvement, but in others, he is more of a hedonistic debauchee anxious to resume his poetic career. For example, whilst in *Epistle* 14 Horace is longing to leave Rome for his farm, chiding his bailiff's lust for wine, women and song, in *Epistle* 15 he is contemplating an excursion to the seaside, anticipating the company of women, rejuvenation and the reconstruction of his lyric *persona* with the help of a bottle of wine (19-21).⁴⁴ We could certainly regard this as Horace's play with the endless possibilities of literary self-presentation but, in light of the project he supposedly embarked on in *Epistle* 1, we should probably view these

⁴⁰ For example, Marchesi 2005:311 observes that in *Satire* 6, (22) Horace alludes to the famous fable of the ass who dons a lion's skin as a way of acknowledging his father's servile origins but this autobiographical association with a servile family past is couched in an argument about Maecenas's ability to distinguish personal talent from familial background. Accordingly, the mention of a servile family history is then at the same time the point in which Horace most clearly and most strongly disassociates his *persona* from that past: 'Thanks to Maecenas the poet's familial past does not extend into his present and no father-son continuity is allowed to be constructed at this point'.

⁴¹ Marchesi 2005:322.

⁴² Marchesi 2005:322.

⁴³ In *Epistle* 1.7, where Horace is most assertive in his declaration of independence, there are also the most reasons to suspect him. Bowditch has convincingly argued for viewing the *persona* of 1.7 as a 'duplicious speaker', a designation fitting from the very beginning of the poem where Horace calls himself 'liar' (*mendax*, 2), 'as if to underscore the potential for deceit possessed by any representation of the self in language', Bowditch 2001:182. Frankel 1957:336 also notices that *Epistle* 1.7 is also the poem in which Horace narrates the most fables.

⁴⁴ '... the kind that will supply me with a stock of words and recommend me, a young man again, to a Lucanian girlfriend', *Epist.* 1.15.20-21; Oliensis 1998:166.

inconsistencies as a portrayal of Horace's stumbling on his path towards *decorum*.⁴⁵ In *Epistle* 15, Horace openly admits to being guilty of such behaviour, saying that, when his means are modest, he is content with little, but should this change he easily praises and aspires to the life of the rich, thinking that only they live well (*bene vivere*, 45, 42-46).

This admission immediately follows the description of the *scurra* Maenius, a typical moral slave who labours just to satisfy his insatiable belly in which, Horace writes, he could fit the contents of an entire marketplace (*Epistle* 1.15.26-35). Prior to supporting the claim by narrating his inconsistent behaviour, Horace adopts Maenius as an emblem of himself: 'Such a man in truth am I' (*nimirum hic ego sum*, 42).⁴⁶ Such an admission might be interpreted in less than serious terms, as a pleasant little piece of poetic self-deprecation, but we should notice how this claim undermines Horace's display of determination in *Epistle* 1.7 not to allow the image of the big-bellied fox to apply to him and his resultant readiness to return to Maecenas all of his gifts. The big-bellied animal Horace identifies with here is of a different species but the connection is clear.⁴⁷ In any case, we are starting to see here glimpses of Davus's Horace in that Horace's *persona* displays precisely the type of behaviour Davus considered as symptomatic of moral slavery. Horace has already admitted that this behaviour has characterised him in the past, but the fact

⁴⁵ It is exactly this sort of behaviour that Panaetius and Cicero singled out as inimical to consistency, see *Off.* 1.111. In any case, it is precisely when it comes to the vice of inconsistency that life and theatre merge in ancient texts. The theatrical metaphor was regarded as the most suitable for representing failures in *constantia*. Most famously, Seneca stated in *Epistle* 120 that, 'This is above all the sign of a foolish mind; it appears first in one form and then in another and, which I judge worst of all, it is never like itself. Believe me, it is a great thing to play the role of one man. But nobody can act the part of a single person except the wise man: the rest of us slip from one character (*persona*) to another', 120.122.

⁴⁶ Horace goes even further in describing the extent of his dependence when he defends himself against the charge of ingratitude to Maecenas, saying 'You've often praised my unassuming self, and I've called you "king" (*rex*) and "father"' (*rexque paterque*, *Epist.* 1.7.37). Here Horace is donning the mask of the parasite since 'king' (*rex*) is a common term used by comic parasites to flatter their patrons, like in Plautus's *Asin.* 919; Damon 1997:112-125.

⁴⁷ The *Scurra* was often equated with an animal in that he was regarded as a morally bankrupt individual who had lost all the attributes of humanity due to his enslavement to his lower appetites. For example, Plutarch says of *scurra* that, 'The belly is all there is to his body. It's an eye that looks high and low, a beast that creeps along on its teeth', *Mor.* 54B; Damon 1997:32. It is this enslavement that led the *scurra* to flatter the powerful, and this behaviour acts as a further indicator of his subhuman nature or, as Demetrius put it, 'A man who flatters the fortunate and ... considers only means of gain, should surely be hated as an enemy of all human nature', *Dem.* 14.65.

that he admits it now, while on his Sabine farm which supposedly allowed him a life free from such vices, obliterates once again any distance between his enslaved past and his supposed 'free' present.

The temptation in scholarship to regard these and similar images as examples of Horatian irony arises from an often displayed confidence that Horace was a type of client quite distinct from the sycophantic 'yes-men' he often caricatures. There are certainly some grounds for the belief that the ancients maintained a clear distinction between the honourable client and the self-serving parasite, and Horace has something to say on this issue in *Epistles* 17 and 18. These are paired poems in which Horace offers instruction in the art of winning and keeping a patron to two young men who are about to embark on their clientary careers. The subject of *Epistle* 1.17 purports to be 'the right way to keep company with men more important than oneself' (*quo ... pacto deceat maioribus uti, Epist.* 2). At lines 13-22, Horace stages a debate between the philosopher Aristippus who associated with the rich and reaped the benefits of doing so, and an uncompromising Diogenes to whom such behaviour was a sign of moral slavery. In lines 13-14, Diogenes alludes to Aristippus's supposed gluttony by saying: 'If Aristippus could learn to dine on turnip greens, he wouldn't mess around with princes' (*si pranderet holus patienter, regibus uti / nollet Aristippus*). Aristippus counters this claim by crediting Diogenes's supposed lack of social graces for his reluctance to associate with the rich: 'If he who rebukes me knew how to mingle with princes, he would come to despise his dreadful vegetables' (*si sciret regibus uti / fastidiret holus qui me notat*, 14-15).

At line 17, Horace states his approval of Aristippus's ways: Diogenes posed as a self-sufficient sage but nevertheless depended on handouts, while Aristippus openly pursued benefits for his services. 'I play the *scurra* for my own benefit', Aristippus says, 'to have a horse to carry me and a patron to feed me' (*scurror ipse mihi ... equus ut me portet, alat rex*, 19-20). Aristippus's strength, Horace writes, was in adapting himself to every circumstance while remaining content whether he had a little or a lot (23-26). Scholars often observe that Aristippus's friendship with the elite validated Horace's own way of life; he appealed to Horace first and foremost because "he was capable of adapting himself to the situation, occasion and role, appropriately performing his part in every circumstance".⁴⁸ Aristippus's adaptability was not regarded as undignified, so it is thought that in emulating his

⁴⁸ D. L. 2.66. Adaptability, as long as it was becoming, has been encouraged in popular morality and was also accorded philosophical respectability by Marcus Aurelius and Aristo of Chios. See, Mayer 1994:44.

ways, Horace maintained his moral freedom in his own encounters with the rich.⁴⁹ Johnson goes further and argues that Aristippus's adaptability was not only morally acceptable behaviour but *required* by *decorum*: 'The capacity to shift, to take up and lay down public *persona* at the proper moment, as *decorum* requires, is a sign of versatility but also a sign of tolerance, acceptance of reality, common sense and even of humility'.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, when in *Epistle* 15 Horace conceded to being content with a little only when he had little, while aspiring for more once his means would allow it, he stated that this trait made him equal to the parasite Maenius rather than to the philosopher Aristippus. Aristippus's own moral freedom is highly doubtful: Horace describes him as someone content with what he had (26), supposedly to indicate his moral freedom, but has him refer to himself as a '*scurra* for his own benefit'. If the *scurra* was in any sense morally free he would no longer be a *scurra* and Aristippus's blunt admission of self-centeredness is particularly difficult to reconcile with his supposed moral freedom. In the ancient ethical treatises, the true *amicus* was characterised primarily by his selfless concern for the welfare of his friend, while the self-centredness of the *scurra* made him incapable of engaging in true friendship and was often the chief indicator of his moral corruption.⁵¹ Aristippus's admission even recalls the *scurra* Mulvius of *Serm.* 2.7, who in a characteristic display of the comic parasite's professional pride boasted of his inability or unwillingness to be a true friend.⁵² In any case, as the epistle progresses, it becomes apparent that Aristippus was less important to Horace as an exemplar of a morally free client than as an exemplar of a successful client who appeared as such. The advice Horace offers to Scaeva in the lines below comes across as a somewhat Machiavellian reformulation of the honourable principles expressed in the *Sermones*: there, the truly honourable client is uninterested in gifts, whilst here the truly successful client *appears* as such (1.17.43-45).⁵³

*Coram rege sua de paupertate tacentes
pula poscente ferent. Distat sumasne pudenter
an rapias: atqui rerum caput hoc erat, hic fons.*

⁴⁹ 'Horace felt a kinship with Aristippus in the internal freedom that he maintained in his encounters with his powerful protector', Pohlenz in Traina 2009:307.

⁵⁰ Johnson 1993:104.

⁵¹ As Konstan 1995:334 observes: 'Aristotle's definition of friendship — mutual good will and selfless regard for the other — continued to inform the literature regarding bonds between unequal partners'.

⁵² Damon 1997:112-125.

⁵³ Oliensis 1998:170.

Clients who don't tell their patrons how poor they are, get more than beggars do. And it is important to accept, not grab. That's the trick, the key to this whole business.

Horace reinforces this point with the image of a foolish, noisy animal: 'If a crow could eat his meal in silence, he'd get more when he found food, and with far less bitterness and fuss' (*sed tacitus pasci si posset coruus, haberet / plus dapis et rixae multo minus inuidiaeque*, 50-51). A second example illustrates the unseemly behaviour of the client who accompanies his patron on a journey but complains at all times about the road, weather and his expenses. Horace compares him to a prostitute who wails at her pretended losses (52-57).

So, 'the right way' to keep company with powerful men, 'the key to the whole business', is to maintain the appearance of an honourable client: go after gifts but avoid appearing like you do.⁵⁴ The advice Horace offers to Scaeva, in short, is to become the sort of *scurra* considered by the ethical treatises to be the more subtle and, to the superior party, the more dangerous sort.⁵⁵ As for Aristippus, it is important to notice that Horace approved of his ways while advising his friend how to be a smart client rather than how to be a free client, or on how to profit from such a relationship while maintaining an aura of respectability by *appearing* free, morally or otherwise. For Aristippus to appear in this context as someone worthy of emulation indicates that he played *this* game well.

It is sometimes asserted that the virtue Aristippus and Horace aimed for in one's life and social relations resided in balance or in the mean between two extremes. Indeed, in line 9 of the following epistle (1.18), Horace writes: 'Virtue is the mean between vices, remote from both extremes' (*virtus est medium vitiorum utrimque reductum*, 18. 9). In this epistle, Horace professes to advise his young friend Lollius on how to maintain a balance between servile compliance and willful independence, but in actuality only goes on to demonstrate the impossibility of achieving it. As such this epistle goes a step further in showing that the *scurra* and the inferior *amicus* are the obverse and reverse of the same coin, and that the chief value of such and similar philosophical precepts lay in reinterpreting the moral compromises necessitated by their existence as adaptability, versatility, 'common sense or even humility'.

Lollius, as Horace portrays him in *Epistle* 18, is a man of independent streak who tends to avoid friendship with the rich for fear of losing his independence. In the opening lines Horace states: 'If I know you well, Lollius,

⁵⁴ For a different view, Kilpatrick 1986:47.

⁵⁵ Cicero observed that flatterers and fakes who put on a pretense of virtue are far more dangerous than overt loudmouths; what distinguishes the flatterer from a true friend is not his manner of behaviour, but the level of insincerity behind it, *Lael.* 99.

being the most independent of men, you will be afraid to show the colours of a *scurra* when you have called yourself a friend' (*si bene te novi, metues liberrime Lolli, / scurrantis speciem praeberere, professus amicum*, 1-2). Lollius has an instinctive abhorrence to appearing as a *scurra* to someone to whom he has offered *amicitia*, and this makes his insertion into the system of patronage problematic — he fears the loss of identity, the loss of a distinct self.⁵⁶ Horace starts by making clear that the true *amicus* and *scurra* are polar opposites: 'A wife in white is as different from a gaudy-coloured prostitute as a real friend is from a parasitic fake' (*ut matrona meretrici dispar erit atque / discolor, infido scurrae distabit amicus*, 18.2-4). The *scurra* is the fearful and sycophantic 'yes-man' whose performance determines future invitations (10-14) and, because Lollius would avoid such a role like the plague, Horace offers him advice in a supposedly middle way between servile subservience and boorish outspokenness (39-40, 44-48):

*Nec tua laudabis studia aut aliena reprendes
nec cum venari volet ille, poemata panges
... tu cede potentis amici.
Lenibus imperiis quotiensque, educet in agros
Aetolis onerata plagis iumenta canesque,
surge et inhumanae senium depono Camenae,
cenes ut pariter pulmenta laboribus empta.*

Don't praise what interests you nor scorn what he enjoys, or sit around composing poems when he prefers to hunt ... respect your friend's position, accept his light commands. So when he is going to the fields and takes his dogs, his asses laden with Aetolian nets, get up, lay aside your melancholy, unsocial Muse and earn your food by work as strenuous as his.

One is hard pressed to find anything of a middle way in the behaviour advised here. A hunting expedition such as Horace envisages here was the standard example of a flatterer's willingness to follow his patron, while the short-term reward for his obedience — food or dinner — is another clear sign that the behaviour Horace advises here is that of a parasite.⁵⁷ A few lines below, Horace advises Lollius further on how to adapt himself to the pursuits and character of his

⁵⁶ Bowditch 1994:415.

⁵⁷ Plutarch, among others, provides an example from the realm of theory and Menander has a wealthy young man accompanied on such a trip by a parasite, *Mor.* 52b-c; *Men. Dys.* 39ff.

potens amicus, and in doing so obscures even further the already hazy boundary between an inferior *amicus* and a *scurra* (86-90):

*Dulcis inexpertis cultura potentis amici:
expertus metuit. tu, dum tua navis in alto est,
hoc age, ne mutata retrorsum te ferat aura.
oderunt hilarem tristes tristemque iocosi,
sedatum celeres, agilem nauumque remissi.*

Those who have never tried think it pleasant to court a friend in power: one who has tried dreads it. While your barque is on the deep, see to it lest the breeze shift and bare your back. The grave dislike the gay, the merry the grave, the quick the staid, the lazy the stirring man of action.

Horace reminds Lollius that courting the great is a strenuous task primarily because it requires one to adapt to the character of a powerful friend; it involves suppressing one's own personality in order to appear in a light the patron will find appealing. There is nothing respectable or 'free' about this type of adaptability; it is merely another name for *dissimulatio*, which in the extant ethical treatises was considered a sure mark of the parasite and flatterer.⁵⁸ Horace goes further and emphasises the theatrics of this process by advising Lollius to draw on his experiences in playing characters when staging plays with his brother (59-64):

*Quamuis nil extra numerum fecisse modumque
curas, interdum nugaris rure paterno.
Partitur lintres exercitus, Actia pugna
te duce per pueros hostili more refertur;
adversarius est frater, lacus Hadria, donec
alterutrum velox Victoria fronde coronet.*

Yes I know you never lie or counterfeit emotions, but you play around at times, out on your father's farm. Opposing sides divide the rowboats, and Actium is fought again: you lead your slaves in battle order; your brother is the foe, your pond the Adriatic, till winged Victory arrives, bringing one of you a leafy crown.

Horace here refers to Lollius and his brother re-enacting the battle of Actium, emphasising that the pretence involved in this process is of the same sort the client

⁵⁸ Cic. *Amic.* 93; Plut. *Mor.* 52b-d; Hunter 1985:484.

requires if he is to be successful in courting his patron. The world of patronal relations, Horace implies, is a world of make-believe, and it is up to the client to keep it as such if he wishes to benefit from the system.

Jacques Perret has referred to *Epistles* 17 and 18 as *ars parasitandi* ('a handbook for parasites') and quite rightly so, as the advice they offer to their addressees is indeed on how to sidle up to the rich and famous in a discreet fashion.⁵⁹ The task of cultivating the patron, these epistles make clear, involves engaging in behaviours that are clearly incompatible with the genuine independence and frankness that the ethical treatises considered a prerequisite for true friendship. What tends to obscure this picture is that Horace's *persona* purports to have insight into the 'right way' of keeping company with powerful men both practically and morally speaking, while in fact delivering advice that clearly sidelines moral considerations in favour of the practical. He appears concerned with teaching young men how to maintain *virtus* in the role of dependent friend, but only gives advice on ways of profiting from the role; he establishes a clear divide between *amicus* and *scurra* only to reveal by his advice the impossibility of maintaining it. What obscures it, in short, is that Horace practises what he preaches and starts each poem with *dissimulatio*, or with the pretence necessary to maintain the theoretical divide between the inferior *amicus* and *scurra*. He then advises potential clients to maintain the divide between the two at the level of appearances; by knowing how to adopt an external demeanour of moral freedom and contentment while at the same time being likeable and providing entertaining company to one's powerful friend. Such advice clearly justifies the title of *ars parasitandi* for these poems, and the designation of parasite for the voice of experience behind them. This voice has already admitted to being a *scurra* in *Epistle* 15 (*nimirum hic ego sum*, 15.42) and thus gave us an early warning that the virtuous teacher we are about to encounter might not be all he seems, and that he might indeed still be engaging in his old habit of *dissimulatio*.

In *Epistles* I, Horace demolishes the credibility of the past literary versions of himself: the free *amicus* of Maecenas has become Maecenas's slave in the very first lines of *Epistle* 1. Horace then starts to demolish the credibility of his present epistolary *persona*, by constructing it as the mask of a dissimulator, as the human face over the slave whom we have come to know as Davus's Horace. As it strips away, this mask reveals itself as composed of theoretical and practical components: of convenient philosophical precepts backed by the correct social performance of the role of the true *amicus*. As I mentioned above, I believe that Horace devised his epistolary *persona* in order to allow the reader a glimpse behind his public and literary face. He wished the reader to see him as a man aware of the moral

⁵⁹ Perret 1959:132; Damon 1997:137; Konstan 1995:340.

compromises and various hypocrisies by which he paved his way to the social and poetic heights we find him at by 20 BC. It is, of course, possible that, in order to serve his artistic ends, Horace is here temporarily assuming the mask of a *scurra* over the true face of an *amicus*, rather than, as I argue, unmasking the *amicus* in order to reveal the true face of a *scurra*. My primary reasons for deciding against such a view are to be found in *Epistle* 20.

Epistle 20 is addressed to the now complete volume of *Epistles*, which is cast in the figure of a pretty slave who longs to run away from Horace. The book wishes to publish itself, to make a fortune in the world by prostituting itself with the help of the Sosii brothers, booksellers here cast as pimps (20.1-5).⁶⁰ While the mask appears to have been disposed of at this point, this is not the case, because Horace's *persona* continues with its *dissimulatio*. In this poem, Horace the author dissociates his *persona* from the actual book and its subhuman state by portraying it as a separate entity that, being wiser, freer and more self-sufficient, disapproves of it and its lowly motives. Nevertheless, like before, this *persona* starts to undermine almost immediately its own claims to moral freedom by using the language of fable. The *persona* warns the slave / book about the dangers of prostituting oneself to the public by evoking as a cautionary exemplum the fable of the ass and the driver (20.14-16):⁶¹

*Ridebit monitor non exauditus ut ille
qui male parentem in rupes protrusit asellum
iratus; quis enim invitum servare laboret?*

Your guardian, his good advices all wasted, will laugh like the man whose donkey balked until he grew so angry he shoved it off the cliff. Why try to save a stubborn ass? (trans. R Fairclough, p. 389).

By employing the language of fable, Horace obliterates any distinction in status between the interlocutors; he reveals that the slave is addressing another slave, or to put it more accurately, that the slave is talking to himself. *Dissimulatio* continues to the very end; Horace does not unmask his *persona* but allows it to be defeated and defied by the book-slave: the *persona* gives up his efforts, releases the slave and instructs him to tell the world *his* story (20). Let us now stop and ask: who is *he*? Whose story will be told? Horace's literary *persona* requested the story, so what reason do we have to think that that which follows will have any connection to an historical Horace? What follows is almost certainly historically accurate information about the author (21-28):

⁶⁰ Oliensis 1995:209-224; Citroni 1986:117-118.

⁶¹ *Aes.* 186; Marchesi 2005:322.

*Me libertino natum patre et in tenui re
maiores pennas nido extendisse loqueris
ut quantum generi demas virtutibus addas;
me primis urbis belli placuisse domique,
corporis exigui, praecanum, solibus aptum,
irasci celerem, tamen ut placabilis essem.
forte meum siquis te percontabitur aeuum,
me quater undenos sciat impleuisse Decembris,
collegam Lepidum quo duxit Lollius anno.*

I was a freedman's son, and amid slender means spread wings too wide for my nest, thus adding to my merits what you take from my birth; say that I found favor both in war and peace with the foremost in the State; of small stature, gray before my time, fond of the sun, quick in temper, yet so as to be easily appeased. If one chance to inquire my age, let him know that I completed my forty-fourth December in the year when Lollius drew Lepidus for colleague.

Few have found reason to question the historical accuracy of the information contained in these lines; the man described here is the historical Horatius Flaccus, the poet and *amicus* of Maecenas. By inserting this piece of straightforward and for the most part widely known autobiographical information, Horace the author makes a point of identifying himself with the dissimulating slave *persona* that has requested his story be told. I believe this to be the first indication that the 'liar *persona*' of *Epistle* 1 was there to represent Horace the author. The second indication is that this *persona* clearly transcends its genre and its time in history: it irreversibly 'stains' Horace's past, present and future 'poetic selves'. It exposes a slavish past, itself as a slave, and in *Epistle* 20 announces the resumption of Horace's poetic career in unaltered 'slavish' terms. This, then, is the only permanent 'self' Horace has left us, the one he can never truly discard but only disguise by temporary masks. The third and final indication has to do with the Book's own *dissimulatio*. By exposing Book 1 of *Epistles* as a slave anxious for publication, Horace ended its own *dissimulatio*; or its pretence to be a collection of personal and 'sincere' letters, while it was really a collection of poems intended for Maecenas. The Book's *dissimulatio* was a crucial component in the liar *persona*'s own pretence and yet quite separate from it, as *Epistle* 20 clearly shows. By maintaining this transparent fiction, Horace the author ensures that, even if we choose to disassociate him from his liar *persona*, we can never separate him or his 'story' from the slave that brought it to us, namely Book 1 of *Epistles*. To separate the author from this book, to disassociate him from the Book's slavish need to

please the master, to be seen, read and admired, is to play the same game the author played when he disassociated his *persona* from it. This is a farce, Horace warns us, disguising the obvious fact that Maecenas requested his poems and he obeyed; he has Maecenas as a master because he himself obeys another master, his belly and all it represents.

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