

Brenda FINEBERG

In Search of the Neighbors' Gardens: Tracking Narratives of Displacement and Desire in Horace's *Epistles*

The years that intervened between Horace's second book of *Satires* (30 BCE) and the first book of *Epistles* (20 BCE) saw the publication in 23 BCE of Odes I-III, those pearls of lyric perfection that assured the poet's place among Rome's literary elite. The publication three years later of *Epistles* I marked a reappearance of the more conversational, seemingly less controlled Horatian voice that had narrated the *Satires* more than a decade earlier. The seventeen addressees of *Epistles* I constitute multiple subjects, both selves and others, who foil and check, deride and amuse, torment and humor the weary but ever restless spirit of the now aging poet. The narrator of *Epistles* I is willing, as the narrator of the *Odes* was not, to leave some seams exposed and some stitches showing. While the *Epistles* lack the lyric perfection of the *Odes*, they offer richer access to the cultural contexts and constraints that shaped Horatian subjectivity. Perhaps just another performance, these pieces, no less artful or contrived than the *Odes*? Perhaps. I shall argue here not that the *Epistles* give us the *real* Horace, but that they constitute a less formal performance, a collection of polyphonous vignettes, self-contradictory assertions, and unguarded moments that reveal not a unified subject but rather a subject whose agency is complicated by ambivalent relations to those who wield power in Rome.

My paper will examine in the three epistles addressed to Maecenas (I.1, 7, 19) the poet's frequent reference to place as way of framing desire and asserting agency. The loss in his youth of his father and the confiscation of his ancestral land in Venusia are rewritten in his attachment to Maecenas and the Sabine farm Maecenas gave him as an adult. The father's ambition for the son, including his providing the best education that Rome and Athens had to offer, reasserts itself in Maecenas' literary patronage and the accompanying social privilege the poet enjoyed in Augustan Rome.

Horace's relations to the city and the countryside (both the rural Apulia of his pre-Roman youth, and the Sabine farm of his successful middle age) include a Rome from which his status as newcomer and (ever after) outsider has distanced him, as well as a countryside to which he feels increasingly re-called in his later years. The most intimate of insiders, and at the same time one who never really felt at home in the city, the Horatian subject records the social and political turmoils of the early principate as a double agent of sorts: he is an outsider looking in, but one with an insider's access to the agents and discourses of power. By the time Horace is writing the *Epistles*, however, being on the inside has come to feel less comfortable, and the discomfort finds expression in an almost obsessive concern with place. It is in the *Epistles* that the well known Horatian treatment of the city / country tension is most honestly and problematically confronted, and where the mature Horatian voice speaks most candidly of his complicated relations with the powerful persons (especially father and patron) and places that haunted and informed his desire.