

HORACE AND
THE RHETORIC OF
AUTHORITY

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ELLEN OLIENSIS



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Ellen Oliensis

Assistant Professor of Classics
Yale University



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With a few exceptions (noted as they arise), where I follow the Teubner text of Friedrich Klinger (Leipzig, 1959), all citations of Horace are culled from the text of E. C. Wickham and H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1912). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

ABBREVIATIONS

In addition to standard abbreviations for ancient authors and works and for journals, the following are used for Horace's works:

<i>Ars</i>	<i>Ars poetica</i>
<i>C.</i>	<i>Odes (Carmina)</i>
<i>E.</i>	<i>Epistles</i>
<i>I.</i>	<i>Epodes (Iambi)</i>
<i>S.</i>	<i>Satires</i>

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INTRODUCTION

Every member of society has not only a face but “face” – the public, projected self-image that is the basic currency of social interactions.¹ In any given encounter, this “face” can be saved or lost, enhanced or maintained, effaced or even defaced. Behind the scenes, and sometimes (more or less discreetly) in mid-scene, faces are changed. We are constantly moving between spheres (social, spatial, and temporal) that put different valuations and demands on our social faces. A face can be put on in the morning and taken off in the evening. It can be “made up,” as we say, or cosmetically altered. One face (for example, blushing or bold) can be applied on top of another; such faces acquire the character of false fronts or masks concealing the purportedly true self – the special face we show to ourselves and to those “other selves” who form our most intimate society. Let us say, then, that everyone has not only “face” but also a potentially infinite set of “faces.” Although these senses of “face” are in principle distinguishable (“face” suggesting “reputation” or “honor,” “faces” a plurality of selves or *personae*), they are also inextricably linked – one’s face depends on the cumulative and shifting reception of one’s faces.

Like the rest of us, Horace will have presented different faces to different people in different situations. He wore one face, we may presume, in the presence of Augustus, and a quite different face when he was giving orders to his slaves. Most of these faces are unavailable to us. We cannot know, for example, how Horace behaved when he was at dinner with Maecenas – what manner he adopted, how he dressed, how he held himself, how much or how little he spoke. But we do know how Horace behaves in his poetry. It is because Horace’s poetry is itself a performance venue that I make no clear, hard-and-fast distinction between

¹ Cf. Goffman (1967) 5; Brown and Levinson (1987) 61.

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the author and the character "Horace." Horace is present in his personae, that is, not because these personae are authentic and accurate impressions of his true self, but because they effectively construct that self – for Horace's contemporary readers, for us, and also for Horace himself.² The reason I prefer the concept of face (a concept native to Latin as well as English, as the semantics of Latin *os*, "face" and *frons*, "brow" indicate) to the new-critical concept of the persona is that it registers this *de facto* fusion of mask and self. I will sometimes call this face the "authorial persona," by which I mean the first-person speaker who gradually accumulates characteristics associated with the figure known as "Horace" – friend of Maecenas, friend of Virgil and Varius, son of a freedman, owner of a Sabine villa, author of *Satires* 1 (in *Satires* 2), author of the *Epodes* (in the *Odes*), author of the *Carmen saeculare* (in *Odes* 4), and so on. This is a character in whose doings Horace has a particular stake: Horace may be held accountable for what "Horace" says and (thereby) does.

Horace's poetic "face" is not identical to Horace, but it will be identified with him. When Horace calls upon the services of a persona in the strict sense – a differentiated character usually distinguished by a distinctive proper name (Alfius in Epode 2, Ofellus in *Satires* 2.2) – it is precisely in order to disavow his authorial responsibility: "this is not Horace speaking." Critics do the same when they attempt to save Horace's face by attributing behavior they find offensive (for example, the misogynous obscenities of his epodes) to a conventional persona (the inherited mask of Archilochian invective). The author, in this view, is situated far above or behind the characters – including the first-person speaker – of his poetry, whom he views, perhaps, with the same critical eye as the modern critic. This may be a fair description of Horace's relation to certain of his personae. But the theatrical metaphor is misleading insofar as it obscures Horace's interest in the doings of his faces – obscures, that is, the extent to which Horace is in fact doing things with his faces, whether they bear the name "Alfius" or the name of the author.³ It may not always be Horace speaking, but it is always Horace acting.

The division between "art" and "life" that is an unquestioned tenet of much classical scholarship does not take account of the fact that works of art are themselves pieces of reality – "Part of the *res* itself, and not about it," as Wallace Stevens puts it. One premise of this study is that Horace's poems are not detached representations of society but consequential acts

² Cf. Martindale (1993) 16–18.

³ On the Alfius epode, see further below, 84–7.

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within society. This is so, moreover, not only when Horace performs the potentially risky act of addressing Augustus, but also when he addresses the slave who works as bailiff on his Sabine farm, the god Faunus, and even (for example, in *Satires* 1.5) no one at all. Horace's poems are very much words that do things; they are, in J. L. Austin's terminology, "speech acts."⁴ They save face, deface, and make faces; they praise, insult, excuse, stake claims, and warn off trespassers. Sometimes they do the opposite of what they say; in *Satires* 2.6, for example, Horace demonstrates his trustworthiness by announcing that he does not enjoy Maecenas' trust.⁵ And sometimes the conflicting impulses of self-promotion and self-effacement twist Horace's poems in unexpected ways; it is this conflict, as we will see, that produces the evasions of *Epistles* 1.7 and the dramatic swerve of the "Cleopatra" ode.

My concern, then, is with the way Horace conducts his life in and by means of his poetry. My approach is thus "biographical" in a particular sense: I am interested not in the light Horace's poetry can shed on his extrapoetic life but in the life that happens in his poetry. I read Horace's poems, accordingly, as complex gestures performed before and for a variety of audiences. I single out authority and deference as the characteristic and complementary strategies of what we might call (following Erving Goffman) Horace's "face-work."⁶ Gestures of authority are potentially rude; they set the poet on a podium some height above his audience, thereby inviting admiration but also envy. Gestures of deference, by contrast, are typically polite; they are the linguistic equivalent of an envy-deflecting bow. While either kind of gesture readily converts into the other – an exaggerated claim of authority can function as a self-parodying self-deflation, an excessive show of deference as an insulting irony – their basic orientation remains constant. Authority makes a claim for the poet's face; deference pays tribute to the face of the audience(s). These poetic postures correspond to the social extremes of which Horace advises his young friend Lollius to steer clear in *Epistles* 1.18: self-assertive arrogance on one side, self-abasing servility on the other. This is advice Horace lives by throughout his poetry, and not only as regards his patron Maecenas. As we will see, gestures of pure deference and pure authority are much rarer in Horace's work than mixtures of the two. When he is addressing an unproblematically subordinated "other" such

⁴ Austin (1975). ⁵ See Griffin (1984) 198–9.

⁶ Goffman (1967) 5–45 (on face-work), (1967) 56–76 (on deference).

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as a slave, Horace regularly cedes some of his authority, making a display – for the reader's if not the addressee's benefit (the servile addressee is not positioned as a reader of Horatian poetry) – of his gracious affability. And when he is addressing an undeniably superior "other," most notably Augustus, he always takes care to safeguard his own authority, even if that means indulging in a certain calculated ungraciousness.

Social and sociolinguistic approaches to Horace have been made in recent years by John Henderson, P. H. Schrijvers, and R. O. A. M. Lyne.⁷ I follow these scholars in reading Horace's poems as preeminently "polite" acts, in the broad sense of acts oriented toward face needs; this book is, among other things, a study of Horatian politeness. To this end, I draw on the insights of the sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.⁸ Brown and Levinson distinguish between "negative face" (the desire to be unencumbered and unimpeded) and "positive face" (the desire for recognition and approval) and between their corresponding forms of politeness. "Negative politeness" conveys respect and maintains distance ("Excuse me, sir"); "positive politeness" presumes familiarity and promotes intimacy ("Hey, pal"). These techniques include not only conventional forms of politeness (respectful and familiar forms of address such as "sir" and "pal") but also the basic elements of grammar and rhetoric (contrast the relatively formal "excuse me" with the casual expletive "hey"). As we will see, Horace often avoids a face-threatening face-off by switching from the authoritative first person singular to the communal first person plural and/or from the confrontational second person to the oblique third person. And he uses rhetorical figures (hyperbole, simile, fable, etc.) not only to delight or to persuade but also to lend his poetic actions a measure of "plausible deniability." In sociolinguistic terms, Horace tends to hedge his speech-acts so as to render them nonactionable.

Horace's strategies change over time. Where Brown and Levinson emphasize the synchronic and the universal, my focus is on the diachronic and the particular – the evolution of Horace's distinctive face.

⁷ Henderson (1993) offers a sociolinguistic analysis of *S. 1.9*; Schrijvers (1993) 75–89 surveys Horace's politeness strategies; Lyne (1995) reads Horace's public poems as face-saving acts.

⁸ The work of Brown and Levinson is also cited by Henderson and Schrijvers; the three of us – in three different countries! – seem to have come upon this suggestive study independently. The summary overview that follows derives from Brown and Levinson (1987) 61–71. Their taxonomy of polite strategies involves numerous other analytic distinctions that I will be taking up only informally; for a systematic overview of Horatian strategies of politeness, I refer the reader to Schrijvers.

For Horace's face changes not only from situation to situation and from poem to poem (sometimes from one line to the next) but from collection to collection. In the course of his career, and as a consequence of it, Horace's face gains value – what Pierre Bourdieu would term “symbolic capital.”⁹ Horace cannot assert as much or the same kind of authority at the beginning of his career as he can at its end. The Horace of *Satires* 1 has less face to save or to spend than the Horace of *Satires* 2; and neither of these Horaces has sufficient face to author the late masterwork of deferential authority known as the *Ars poetica*. The more face Horace accumulates, the less effort he needs to devote to maintaining it, especially against threats from inferiors. Indeed, as his face becomes better known and more widely recognized, Horace spends more time defending his negative than promoting his positive face – such is the price of celebrity. As Horace gains authority, moreover, he defers differently – paying more deference to Augustus and less to Maecenas, for example.

On the other hand, a Horatian poem can never function simply as the written equivalent of a gesture such as a bow or a sneer. A compliment or insult delivered in the medium of literature differs significantly from one delivered in everyday social intercourse. For J. L. Austin, this difference was fundamental; Austin excluded literary speech acts from his account on the grounds that “a performative utterance will . . . be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem.”¹⁰ I agree with Austin that literary speech acts undergo a “sea-change” (Austin's phrase). But the change is such as to render them not “hollow or void” but – to follow Austin's allusion – “rich and strange.” Literary performatives are enriched and estranged performatives. Everyday acts of politeness target a limited audience – the immediate addressee(s) and (sometimes) assorted onlookers and eavesdroppers. Horace's poetic acts of politeness, by contrast, outlast their (invented or reconstructed) occasions; they address more audiences and perform more functions. It is true that face-to-face interactions are often similarly overdetermined. A subordinate may bark orders at his underlings with renewed emphasis when his superior is on the scene – the message being less “Do your job!” than “Look how well I am doing mine!”; or he may perform his authority for the sake of his own onlooking self, thereby

⁹ See Bourdieu (1977) 179 (defining “symbolic capital” as “the prestige and renown attached to a family and a name”).

¹⁰ Austin (1975) 22. For an overview of responses to Austin, see Petrey (1990) 70–85.

reassuring himself of his own mastery. But Horace's poetry is not just occasionally but always and inevitably triangulated in this way. Horace's favorite game is the game of "three-cornered catch" (*lusum . . . trigonem*, S. 1.6.126) – a game he plays not only on the grassy Campus Martius but also across the pages of his books.

The game has at least three corners. Horace has several audiences, some or all of whom may be in attendance for any one poem or book of poems: the addressee, what I term the "overreader" (an unnamed but otherwise specified other who may be imagined as reading over the addressee's shoulder),¹¹ the reading public, and posterity.¹² These audiences (which may coalesce within any given poem – the addressee with posterity, the overreader with the reading public, and so on) are all potentially present, whether or not they are explicitly and directly invoked, in the rhetorical economy of the poem. The addressee is the figure Horace explicitly addresses, usually but not always by name. Horace's addressees include the (still) famous and readily identifiable (Maecenas, Agrippa, Augustus); the little known or unknown (Lollius, Septimius, Scaeva); named and nameless types (Tyndaris in *Odes* 1.17, the ex-slave of Epode 4, the greedy landowner of *Odes* 2.18); and the overtly fictional or mythical (Faunus, Melpomene). In Horace's carefully constructed poetic "situations," this addressee sometimes functions as a conduit for another conversation with an overreader; it is this kind of relation, whereby one person stands in for or in front of another, that makes up what I am calling the rhetorical economy.

I mean the term "overreader" as a response to John Stuart Mill's famous assertion that poetry is not heard but overheard. In Mill's romantic definition, the poet speaks first of all, sincerely and privately, to himself or herself, and secondarily to those overhearing these meditations. Horace, by contrast, tends to speak or write directly to someone and obliquely to someone else. This dynamic is especially pronounced in Horace's epistles, "open letters" which bear one address but are designed to be intercepted by numerous others. But it is at work, to some degree,

¹¹ While my overreader is differently positioned from Barchiesi's paranoid imperial addressee, my interest in "overreading" owes much to his (over)readings of Hor. *E.* 2.1 and Ov. *Tr.* 2; see Barchiesi (1993).

¹² On the Horatian addressee, cf. Johnson (1982) 4–5, 127. For related articulations of Horace's multiple audiences, see Gold (1992); Citroni (1995) 290 and in general 271–375. Citroni's emphasis on the dual orientation of Horace's poetry (always having in view both a smaller circle of friends and a larger, anonymous reading public) provides a useful corrective to Lefèvre (1993), who tends to treat Horace as a coterie poet.

throughout Horace's poetry. When Horace goes on the attack in the *Epodes*, he is performing before and for Maecenas and the young Caesar; he may address a wealthy ex-slave (for example), but his words are not primarily meant for his ears. Contrariwise, when he tells Maecenas that he is disinclined to comply with his latest demands, the declaration targets not only Maecenas but also and perhaps especially the overreading public, which may be prone to view Horace's relation to Maecenas in an unflattering light. In examples such as these, indirection enables Horace to make an effective demonstration of (instead of merely protesting) his values and his value. Elsewhere, it acts like a discursive extension of the polite grammar that substitutes the third person for the second, enabling Horace to say something to the overreader that he could not say to his face without injuring his own face and/or that of the overreader.¹³ It is not by chance that it is within a letter to Lollius (*E.* 1.18) that Horace vents most freely his mixed feelings about friendship with the great. In such cases, whatever is said is said "off the record"; Horace can always claim that he was merely addressing his addressee, not his overreader (here Maecenas), and that his overreader was, in a word, "overreading" – not taking Horace's words at face value.

The less significant Horace's addressee, the more likely s/he is to subserve an overreader; a slave, for example, is readily converted to the instrumental function of medial addressee. But even when Maecenas or Augustus is the addressee, Horace always has an eye out for the impression he is making on other overreaders. These overreaders typically include Horace himself (Horace is always situated as an accomplished and interested overreader of his own poems), the reading public (including especially Horace's invidious critics, whether fictitious or actual), and, more and more, the audience of posterity. In the course of his career, Horace displays a growing awareness that his poetic faces will continue to circulate long after he himself has passed from view. It is this awareness that enables Horace to assert his authority even in (if not exactly to) the face of readers such as Maecenas and Augustus. It is the power of Horace's poems, finally, and not the power of Maecenas or Augustus, that will perpetuate Horace's name.

To clarify the issues I will be raising and the kind of reading I will be pursuing in this study, I turn, by way of example, to *Epistles* 2.2. Horace's

¹³ On these forms of polite mediation, cf. Schrijvers (1993) 82–6; Seeck (1991) 539–40 (on Horace's "satiric grammar").

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second book of epistles comprises two lengthy letters, the first directed to Augustus himself, the second to a relatively low-profile friend named Florus, a lawyer and poet in the entourage of Tiberius Nero to whom Horace has already introduced us in *Epistles* 1.3.¹⁴ It is the initial gesture of *Epistles* 2.2 that will preoccupy me here.

After saluting Florus in one dignified line, Horace abruptly launches into an elaborate account of a hypothetical business proposition. Say someone offered to sell you a slave (*si quis forte velit puerum tibi vendere*, *E.* 2.2.2); say he quoted you a very reasonable price; say he drew attention to the boy's good looks (*talos a vertice pulcher ad imos*, 4); say he advertised his smattering of culture – the boy knows a little Greek (*litterulis Graecis imbutus*, 7), and he can even sing a bit, nothing polished, but pleasant to listen to when you're drinking (*quin etiam canet indoctum sed dulce bibenti*, 9). Say, finally, that he added a warning: the boy has been known to shirk his work and hide under the stairs. If you bought this piece of goods, you wouldn't have the right to bring a complaint against the seller later on, would you? After eighteen lines in this vein, Horace finally comes to the point (20–4):

dixi me pigrum proficiscenti tibi, dixi
talibus officiis prope mancum, ne mea saevus
iurgares ad te quod epistula nulla rediret.
quid tum profeci, mecum facientia iura
si tamen attemptas?

I told you when you were leaving I was slow, I told you I was almost crippled when it came to such duties – just so you wouldn't fly into a rage at me for not writing you back. What good did it do me, if you attack me even though the law is on my side?

Caveat emptor: Horace warned Florus in advance of his failings, and Florus has no right to complain if he gets, so to speak, just what he paid for. But it is not only a letter of which Florus claims to have been cheated. Horace appends a second accusation in what the narratologists term “free indirect discourse”.¹⁵ “And then you complain about this too, about my not sending you the odes you've been waiting for, liar that I am” (*quereris super hoc etiam, quod | exspectata tibi non mittam carmina*

¹⁴ The date and composition of *E.* 2 remain controversial; it will be evident that I believe that *E.* 2.1 and 2.2 were designed as complementary counterparts (whether or not they were accompanied by a third poem, the *Ars poetica*).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Rimmon-Kenan (1983) 110–13.

mendax, 24–5). In Chapter 4, we will meet two Horatian slaves who bear a certain resemblance to this good-looking, musically-inclined *puer*: the personified slave-book of *Epistles* 1.20 and the cupbearer of *Odes* 1.38. The slave of *Epistles* 2.2 is thus an apt figure for both the letter and the lyrics that are the objects of Florus' frustrated desire – a desire that this epistle itself goes a long way toward satisfying.

But what I want to underscore here is the character of the gesture enacted by these opening lines. Let me note, to begin with, that Horace is offering a defensive excuse and not an apology (for example, the familiar "I'm sorry to have taken so unconscionably long to answer your letter"). Why not? Apologies are inherently deferential speech acts; the apologizer effectively injures his own face by acknowledging that he has done a wrong to the other's. And Horace is not ready to humble himself to this extent before his young friend. On the other hand, it is clear that Horace's tone of mock-huffiness functions here less as a rebuke than as a compliment to Florus. It would have been easy enough for Horace to "pull rank" on Florus. He might have claimed to have more important things, or more important people, on his mind; he might have reminded Florus that he has already done him the honor of addressing him one epistle (*Epistles* 1.3). By laying the blame on his own imperfect head, Horace implicitly concedes Florus' right to expect more.

Horace is making a claim for his own negative face. But he does so in a way that flatters Florus' positive face. The confidential rhetoric of the "sales pitch" is itself an ingratiating piece of positive politeness. By identifying his poetic face with a young and minimally talented *puer*, moreover, Horace temporarily abdicates the social and poetic authority he has acquired over the years. He can afford to, of course; no one could mistake this hilariously self-deprecating image for a straightforward self-portrait. The image saves Horace's face because it so obviously fails to fit it: Horace can jokingly identify the freely tendered *officia* of a friend with the command performances of a slave – a figure who has no negative face at all – only because it is quite clear that he has, in relation to Florus, nothing of the slave about him. But the image saves Florus' face as well. After all, it is the junior poet, not the master poet, whom we might expect to find in the role of the musically-inclined young slave; Horace might have compared Florus to a slave who has (say) performed a song for his master and who is now eagerly awaiting his reward. The problem is that such an apportionment of roles would in this case be too close to the discursive situation of the letter in which it appears – the hyperbole

would be insulting to Florus rather than amusing. By casting himself in the junior and subordinate role, Horace graciously keeps Florus out of it.

Neither the friendship between Horace and Florus nor the epistle that helps confirm it exists in isolation. There is, first, an implicit contrast between this friendship and Florus' "friendship" with Tiberius Nero, the emperor's stepson. The contrast is underscored by Horace's opening salutation, where the vocative "friend," which would normally refer to the relation between the speaker and the man thus addressed, refers instead to Florus' relation to Tiberius: "Florus, faithful friend to good and glorious Nero" (*Flore, bono claroque fidelis amice Neroni*, *E.* 2.2.1).¹⁶ The line gives praise where praise is due, assigning to Florus the cardinal virtue of the subordinate (fidelity), to Tiberius the shining character of a leader. As he announces Florus' fidelity to Tiberius, Horace indirectly evidences his own, offering Tiberius the deferential tribute of a compliment. But the relation between this decorous salute and the hypothetical sales pitch that follows it is not readily apparent. Horace may seem to be drawing a contrast between faithful Florus and his own unreliable self. And yet it is not Horace but Florus, "faithful friend" of Tiberius, who serves an imperial "master" and forfeits some measure of his freedom in that service. It is not that Horace is venting his hostility to Tiberius or actively competing with him for Florus' affections. Rather, he is supplementing formality with informality and work with play. In Horace's company – in his epistle – Florus can play the master, if he likes, to his heart's content.

But there is another relation to which this relatively relaxed epistolary friendship forms an implicit and designed contrast. Whereas *Epistles* 2.2 opens by acknowledging Florus' allegiance to Tiberius, its companion piece in *Epistles* 2 pays homage to Horace's and all Italy's imperial patron – Augustus himself. Horace opens, accordingly, with an apology for his presumption in addressing the greatest man, incorporating a series of compliments into an exemplary gesture of negative politeness (*E.* 2.1.1–4):

Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus,
res Italas armis tuteris, moribus ornes,
legibus emendes, in publica commoda peccem,
si longo sermone morer tua tempora, Caesar.

¹⁶ This is in fact the sole exception to the Horatian norm, which is illustrated by *S.* 2.6.90, *I.* 1.2, *I.* 13.3, *C.* 2.9.5, *C.* 2.14.6, *E.* 1.7.12, *E.* 1.18.106, *E.* 2.2.138, and *Arts* 4.

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Since so many and such great concerns fall upon your shoulders alone – since you protect our Italian state with arms, adorn it with virtuous habits, correct it with laws – I would sin against the public good if I were to take up your time with a lengthy conversation, Caesar.

The contrast with the epistle to Florus is instructive. There, Horace protects his own negative face – his right to be free of Florus' demands; here, it is the emperor's negative face that is at issue. There, Florus is seeking a token of his friend's esteem as balm for his positive face; here, it is Horace who is initiating what he represents as a possibly unwelcome contact. The difference comes into focus when we consider what the effect would be if Horace's addressees exchanged places. An equivalent apology to Florus ("Please forgive my trespassing on your valuable time, Florus") would sound ironic; an equivalent excuse to Augustus ("Don't scold me for not writing sooner, Augustus, I warned you I wasn't much of a correspondent") would sound presumptuously familiar or even dangerously self-assertive.

As it happens, another representation of the underlying situation of the epistle to Augustus has survived. Suetonius preserves part of a letter to Horace in which Augustus complains, in a tone of flattering familiarity, "I'll have you know I'm angry at you because in all your writings of this kind you don't talk with me in particular" (*irasci me tibi scito, quod non in plerisque eiusmodi scriptis mecum potissimum loquaris*); it was in response to this letter, according to Suetonius, that Horace composed the letter we know as *Epistles* 2.1. I will have occasion to return to Augustus' letter later in this book. What interests me here is that this very situation – a friend writes in mock-anger at not having received the expected tribute of a letter – furnishes the premise not of Horace's epistle to Augustus but of Horace's epistle to Florus (*ne mea saevus | iurgares, ad te quod epistula nulla rediret*, *E.* 2.2.21–2). The situation decorously suppressed from the one epistle thus resurfaces in the other. Given that *Epistles* 2.2 is designed to be overread by Augustus, the de facto dedicatee of the collection, we could say that the epistle to Florus functions as an oblique and nonactionable rebuke of Horace's imperial complainant. Or at least it enables Horace to play at, and to play out, a combination of compliant servility and self-assertive disobedience that he could not perform to the emperor's face without risking his own face. Let me add that while the evidence of Suetonius gives added point to the juxtaposition of these two letters within *Epistles* 2, we do not need his evidence to establish