

Quintus Horatius Flaccus

65 BC to 8 BC

Roman lyric poet, satirist, and critic Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus) was born in Apulia, Italy, in 65 B.C. His father, an Italian Freedman, sent Horace to the finest school in Rome—the *grammaticus* Orbilius. He then studied literature and philosophy in Athens. In 44 B.C., he became a staff officer in Brutus' army. He fought in the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., where Marc Antony and Octavian (later Augustus) defeated the forces of Brutus. Horace claimed to have fled from the battle, leaving his shield behind. As a result of the defeat, his military career was over and he lost his family's estate.

Augustus offered amnesty to the defeated soldiers, and Horace moved to Rome where he worked as a clerk in the Treasury. It is unclear whether he wrote poems before this time, but he turned now to writing with the hope of receiving recognition and patronage. He became friends first with the poets Virgil and Varius, and in around 38 B.C. with Maecenas, who was an advisor to Augustus. Horace first published his *Satires* in two books in 35 B.C. Maecenas gave Horace a farm in the Sabine country, near Tivoli, which allowed Horace a modest income and the leisure to write. He enjoyed life on the farm; Suetonius reports that he often lay in bed until 10 a.m.

In 29 B.C. he published the *Epodes*, in 23 B.C. the first three books of *Odes*, and in 20 B.C. his first book of *Epistles*. Augustus asked Horace in 17 B.C. to write a ceremonial poem celebrating his reign to be read at the Saecular Games. In 14 B.C. he published his second book of *Epistles*, which he followed a year later with his fourth book of *Odes*. In the final years of his life, he wrote his *Ars poetica*. He died in 8 B.C.



Horace is best known today for his *Odes*, which often celebrate common events such as proposing a drink or wishing a friend a safe journey. Although he wrote in many different meters and of different themes, the odes often express ordinary thoughts and sentiments with a deceptive finality and simplicity. Alexander Pope wrote of them saying, "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." His *Ars poetica*, which was written in the form of a letter to the Pisones, has also had a profound influence on later poetry and criticism. In it, Horace advises poets to read widely, to strive for precision, and to find the best criticism available. Along with Virgil, Horace is the most celebrated of the Augustan poets. His work would deeply influence later writers including Ben Jonson, Alexander Pope, W.H. Auden, Robert Frost, and many others.

Works:

Satires 1	(c. 35–34 BC)
Satires 2	(c. 30 BC)
Epodes	(30 BC)
Odes 1–3	(c. 23 BC)
Carmen Saeculare	(17 BC)
Epistles 2	(c. 11 BC)
Odes 4	(c. 11 BC)
Ars Poetica	(c. 10–8 BC)

[Ancient Biography of Horace](#)
by Suetonius