The Foliate Lyre:
The Use of the Countryside In Horace's Odes

by

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Introduction

The tradition of lyric poetry had long been dormant—analyzed and categorized by the Alexandrian bookkeeper-poets, then shuttled away onto a shelf in the form of the Anthology—when Horace breathed new life into the genre with the Odes. In the Odes, Horace awakened the old voices of lyric poetry, the exuberant, spontaneous voices of ancient Greece, and adapted them into a unique genre of Latin lyric that bore his own poetic mark. He revived many of the themes of Greek lyric, retouching them slightly to apply to Roman life in the burgeoning empire of Augustus, but his also added an element of his own. In Greek lyric, themes of love, war, politics, and the symposium were pervasive and during the centuries when the genre had originally flourished these themes were addressed in subtle and original ways by poets who became famous for their individual voices throughout all Greece. The depiction of the natural world, however, was almost entirely absent from Greek lyric poetry, and when it was addressed in a poem is was merely as a compositional element, a piece of scenery to create a certain atmosphere. More than six hundred years after Archilochus invented lyric poetry on the island of Paros, Horace introduced for the first time a vivid natural world into the genre, an entire rustic landscape with its own inhabitants and values, traditions and beliefs. Horace’s introduction of the countryside into lyric poetry was not merely an aesthetic addition; it was a considered artistic choice based on an erudite usage of the literary history of the ancient world, as well as a reflection of the social and political climate of his day and its particular estimation of the countryside.
The purpose of this paper is to investigate the different ways that Horace depicts the countryside in the *Odes*. In order to place this investigation in a social and political context, we will begin by tracing the Roman ideology of the countryside, specifically the ideology of agriculture, from the early Republic to the time of Augustus' principate. Then we will turn to the life of the poet and examine the role that the countryside played in his personal and artistic development. After laying this groundwork, we will carry out a concentrated study of the use of the countryside and the natural world in the *Odes*

**Life of Horace**

Quintus Horatius Flaccus was born on December 8th, 65 BC, in Venusia, a Roman military colony between Apulia and Lucania that had been established during the Sullan land confiscations of 81 BC.¹ His father, the only relation of the poet to whom he refers, was a freedman who had been given along with his manumission a job as a revenue officer and the holding of a small farm.² For part of his youth Horace lived in this military colony, going to the local school with rough-necked centurions' sons for classmates, but his father, believing him worthy of better atmosphere and a finer education, soon took him to Rome "that he might be taught the same things any *eques* or a senator would have their own children learn."³ After studying in Rome under the grammarian Orbilius, a martinet from whom he received

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¹ Fraenkel, p. 2  
² Wilkinson, p. 7  
³ Sat. 1.6.77-78
a top-notch education in Latin poetry, Greek, and rhetoric, Horace traveled to Athens to attend philosophical lectures at the Academy, where he studied among the ranks of such eminent contemporaries as Marcus Cicero, the son of the famous orator. This education came to an end when, after the murder of Julius Caesar, Brutus came to Athens to join the Academy. His presence at the lectures instilled the students with ideological fervor, and when the conflict with Augustus (then Octavian) drew near they flocked to the Republican cause and en masse enlisted in Brutus’ army. Horace was appointed to the command of a legion and received the title of military tribune; how this freedman’s son rose so high so quickly in rank is unknown, but at the least his promotion suggests that he must have displayed a marked enthusiasm for the cause to be entrusted with such a position. In the decisive encounter with the troops of Augustus and Antony at Philippi (42 BC), however, this enthusiasm gave way to Horace’s good common sense when, in the routing of Brutus’ troops, he managed to escape the battlefield and flee to safety.

By the time Horace made it back to Rome, his father was dead and his family farm in Venusia had been confiscated—he was “bereaved of paternal Lares and farm” (inopem paterni et laris et fundi). The appropriations Augustus orchestrated after Philippi to satisfy his 100,000 veterans had cut deep into the Italian countryside; the first lands to be confiscated came from those areas that had sided with Brutus and Cassius, but, when more land was needed, Augustus became more indiscriminate and appropriated land from villages that were merely proximate to the offending

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4 Wilkinson, p. 7
5 *Epistles* 2.2.50-51
townships; included among the appropriations was Venusia. Tens of thousands of farmers were evicted from their lands in these seizures, coming to the city in droves to find employment, and Horace was no different in this respect; he procured himself a modest and unlaborious job as a *scriba quaestorium*, or Treasury officer around 39 BC. It was at this point in his life that Horace began his career as a poet.

Composing poetry in the style of Lucilius, Horace attracted a good deal of attention from the literati of Augustan Rome—much of it negative we are told in the *Satires*. But the discriminating ear of Virgil must have liked the balanced wit and causticity of Horace’s verse, because the two poets became acquainted and Virgil, together with the poet Varius, provided Horace with an introduction to his patron Maecenas, a minister in Augustus’ cabinet and famous supporter of the arts. That Horace and Virgil became friends is not surprise; both poets were victims of the Philipi confiscations and they shared—or at least came to share—an appreciation for the countryside as more than just a peaceful setting with shading canopy and soft grass, but as incorporating values lost in the past that must be celebrated and regained. Virgil had published his first collection of poetry, the *Eclogues*, in 39 BC, a collection of pastoral poems closely fashioned after the *Idylls* of the Alexandrian poet Theocritus, inventor of the pastoral genre, and it was certainly an influence on Horace. But Horace’s first publication, the *Satires*, did not yet address the world of the countryside; it was a book of urban discontent.

The Rome of Horace’s day was a city in the throes of revolutionary change, experiencing a political and cultural metamorphosis that transformed nearly every

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6 See L.P. Wilkinson’s introduction to his translation of Virgil’s *Georgics*, p. 14  
7 Fraenkel, p. 14  
8 Conte, p. 293
rooted convention of the Republic into something grander and more cosmopolitan. In 35 BC, the year Horace published his first book of *Satires*, the capital was struggling to adjust in the aftermath of Phillipi to the uneasy new regime of the second Triumvirate and political anxiety ran high among those who wanted to secure themselves a place in the nascent Empire. This fervor was compounded by the influx of Italian peasants who were displaced in the land confiscations and chose Rome as the location of their resettlement; this phenomenon swelled the population of the city, and the new quarters built to accommodate these peasants added another dimension to the “smoke, might and noise” (*fumum et opes strepitumque*) already present. In addition to these social developments the cultural climate of Rome was also undergoing significant change. After the army of M. Claudius Marcellus sacked Syracuse in 212 BC during the second Punic War, the trove of Greek spoils taken back to Rome created a sensation among the upper classes and radically influenced Roman taste in art and fashion. The plundering of Carthage and Corinth yielded likewise a glimpse of Eastern luxuries, which captured a seamier side of the Roman imagination with their sensual excesses. Subsequent campaigns in Asia Minor, such as those commanded by Sulla in the 1st century BC, introduced Roman soldiers to further forms of sensuality and decadence, as well as to the fine art and customs of the lands formerly part of the Persian empire; as Sallust writes, “it was there [in Asia] that Roman soldiers first learnt to indulge in wine and women, and to cultivate a taste for statues, pictures, and embossed plate.”

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9 *Odes* 3.29.12

10 Rudd, p.161-4

11 Sallust, *Catilinae Conspiratio*, 10.6-13.5
taste for foreign luxury, and by the time of Horace its influence had become so pervasive that the appellation "Greek" was nearly synonymous with refinement, and affluent Romans embraced Oriental fashions and entertainments—preferring, for instance, to serve lavish delicacies imported from the East at parties and banquets rather than traditional Roman fare. In the midst of these innovations, the social and cultural mores of the Republic—where moderation had been enforced by laws regulating the consumption and ostentation of the wealthy—were displaced by a new grandeur and opulence of taste that was to be monumentalized in the age of Augustus, who arrived as a victor in a city of brick and departed a god from a city of marble.

Horace composed the *Satires* in the midst of this period of cultural transformation. In the first book of that work, the primary targets of Horace’s censure are the novel excesses of contemporary Rome and those vices that are common to human nature, but which the cultural environment of his day encouraged and gave vulgar new forms of expression. In the fourth poem of the book, Horace recounts how in his childhood his father provided him with a moral education—and a satirical bent, perhaps—by pointing out members of the community who behaved immorally and emphasizing the ruinous results; for instance:

"nonne vides, Albi ut male vivat filius, utque Baius inops? magnum documentum, ne patriam rem perdere quis velit"

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12 Rudd, p. 162
13 Sumptuary laws like the *Lex Fannia* and the *Lex Orchida* delimited the amount a private citizen could spend on dinner, and how many people one could invite. See Rudd, p. 163.
14 *Suetonius, Divus Augustus*, 28: *Urbem neque pro maestate imperii ornatam et mundationibus incendisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit glorius marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset*
“Surely you see how badly Albius’ son fares, and how penniless Baius is? A great example, lest anyone wish to squander their patrimony!”  

(109-11)

Horace says his father taught him in this way, through the incisive observation of other people’s folly, to be “free from these [vices] and the disasters they bring.”  

This lesson learned in childhood is the lesson that Horace imparts in the *Satires*, and the moral tone of the *Odes* derives largely from its significance—vice is condemnable not because it conflicts with any puritanical morality, but because it brings more trouble than its worth, and therefore unhappiness. In the first book of *Satires* Horace attempts to curb the vices of his culture in the same way a doctor counsels a patient against his bad habits so that he may be healthier and happier; Horace, who is at this point a prominent man about town and may fancifully be imagined as a Roman analogue to Proust’s M. Swann, has a privileged view of these vices among all ranks of society. In this book, Horace provides us with a panoramic vision of the city that functions as a catalogue of these vices, all of which boil down to two primary categories of excessive desires: ambition and avarice. Poems like 1.1 and 1.6 deride people who are discontent with their lot and seek to find happiness by changing professions or by seeking greater wealth and renown in their own profession, or by social climbing, like the “bore” in 1.9 who desires an entrée to the elite circle of Maecenas. Satire 1.1 also ridicules the futile vanity of avarice, which causes men to unnecessarily hoard possessions and to incite envy among their fellows. Horace, however, condemns profligacy along with miserliness—both habits deviate from the

15 All translations from the Latin are my own.
16 Sat. I.4.129-30: “sanus ab illis,/ perniciem quaecumque ferunt”
healthy mean in their excesses, and neither bring contentment. In this first book of *Satires*, Horace depicts the foolishness of such excesses and, at the end of 1.6, he describes his own approach to urban contentment as an alternate path to happiness: it consists of simple meals, independence from pressing obligations, and plenty of leisure time in which to compose poetry and enjoy the simple pleasures of a stroll, a game of ball, or a swim at the baths.\(^{17}\) Horace’s lifestyle, however, is an egregious exception. The rule of Roman life as depicted in the *Satires* is extravagance and servitude to ill-considered desires, and the atmosphere created by these imbalances is one of anxiety and discontent—fundamental characteristics of Horace’s urban landscape. To Horace, a poet who prizes self-cultivation and philosophical balance, this environment is necessarily inimical.

In the second book of the *Satires*, published around 30 BC,\(^ {18}\) Horace critiques the city from a different, more totalizing approach. The pivotal gift of the Sabine farm, given by Maecenas after the publication of the first book of *Satires*, around 32 BC,\(^ {19}\) allowed Horace to regard the foibles of Roman life from the more detached perspective of the countryside. Instead of being an entrenched urban poet satirizing his surroundings from the subjective viewpoint of a participant, Horace now found a point of contrast in his new country life against which he could hold up the qualities of the city that he criticized in the first book of *Satires* for comparative scrutiny. It is here, from the comfort of his Sabine farm, that he establishes a view of the countryside as an alternate landscape with an indigenous morality that runs counter to that of the city. Immediately in the second poem of the book, after an obligatory

\(^{17}\) *Sat.1.6.111-28*
\(^{18}\) Conte, p. 293
\(^{19}\) Fraenkel, p. 15
response to the critics of the first book of *Satires*, Horace contrasts the extravagant and unhealthy gourmandizing of the Romans with the eating habits of a rustic farmer of his acquaintance, Ofellus. In the framework of this poem, what and how a person eats are a reflection of his values. The Romans prefer foods with spectacular appearances and exotic provenances, caring more about their ostentatious presentation than about their worth as sustenance (23-52); Ofellus on the other hand enjoys a simple diet that is neither too stingy nor too elaborate, and on the occasion of a guest’s arrival he entertains him not with imported delicacies but with the bounty of his own land, washed down by liberal cups of wine (116-25). The implication is that people in the country are more in touch with moderate and healthy living than those who live in the city; this is one of the few cardinal truths in Horace’s poetry and one that has a constant thematic presence in the *Odes*. In 2.6, Horace introduces this theme with greater scope and clarity, and with a force that firmly grounds it as a foundation of his poetic philosophy. In this poem, Horace addresses not only the extravagances of the people who lived in the capital but also the distractions of the city itself, contrasting them with the simplicity and independence he experiences in the country.

The poem begins with a loving description of the newly acquired Sabine farm, which allowed the poet to escape from the corruption and distraction of the city that had fired his indignation in book one, and furthermore provided Horace with the lyrical vantage necessary for composing the *Odes*. The description is short and sweet:

*Hoc erat in votis: modus agri non ita magnus,*
hortus ubi et tecto vicinus iugis aquae fons
et paulum silvae super his foret. Auctius atque
di melius fecere. bene est.

Such was in my prayers: a plot of land not too big,
where there would be a garden, an ample fountain
of water near the house, and above them some
woods. More blessedly and better have the gods
done. This is fine.

(1-4)

The sentiment expressed in these lines is that of humble but absolute contentment,
conveyed through the use of reverential language bathed in the soft white light of
Horace’s simple and slow phrasing. The poet has been granted his dearest wish, and it
suits him perfectly. Then, with a short and slightly jarring segue, the poem shifts
from this beatific scene to a description of a typical day of Horace’s life when duty
calls him to be in the city. This description delineates once and for all the reasons
why, for Horace, country life is preferable to city life.

In addition to the moral infirmity of the city, which the first book of Satires
portrays in sharp detail, there are certain unavoidable aspects of life in Rome that are
deleterious to Horace’s contentment, which calls for an independence that allows time
for reflection and which must come from a degree of autonomy from pressing
concern. In 2.6 Horace lists them all. The crowded nature of the city is the most
obvious of these aspects; the poet finds that he has to push and shove his way through
the streets, incurring the envious curses of those who imagine him to be on his way to
visit Maecenas, his famous patron (27-31). Then there are the importunate obligations
of city life as well, such as the matutinal salvatio at Maecenas’ house, where Horace
must go every morning to pay his respects to his patron amid a clamorous mob of
other, less distinguished clients (23-26); afterwards, when the poet finally reaches the office of the *decuria scribarum*, the exigencies of his employment cause him to again descend into the crowds, running around the city at the behests of his superiors (34-39). In addition to these nuisances there is also the pervasively political nature of Rome; everyone is constantly occupied either with the latest reports back from the frontiers or the intrigues on the Capitoline and the Palatine hills, anguishing themselves over events that aren’t, or shouldn’t be, their personal concern—and distracting the poet in the process (51-58). This is life in the big city, and Horace exclaims out of aggravation: “O countryside, when will I look on you again!”20 The poem then returns its focus to the country, and the pleasures the poet enjoys in the course of a typical dinner party at his Sabine farm. In book two, Horace, like Hemingway, is a gustatory writer, and he introduces the scene of the party with a description of the succulent, rustic meal that he and his friends consume beside the statues of his household gods (63-67). The food is accompanied by wine, which the poet and his guests drink “*solutus legibus insanis*” (free from crazy [literally: unhealthy] laws, 68-69) that sometimes govern one’s drinking at a symposium; that the amount one drinks at Horace’s rustic parties is not decreed by a symposiarch, as is often the case in the city, but is instead freely decided according to one’s personal discretion is an indication of the general freedom from constraints and obligations one finds in the country. The evening is then rounded off with edifying conversation on the topics of virtue and the nature of friendship, similar to that described by Plato in the *Symposium* (70-76).

20 *Sat.2.6.60: “o rus, quando ego te aspiciam”*
In 2.2 and 2.6, Horace introduces the theme of the country versus the city that is crucial to the understanding of the use of the country in the *Odes*, and he first applies to these opposing landscapes the attributes that will remain constant throughout the rest of his poetry. The city, Horace contends, is a site of moral corruption where people are prevented from living properly by their excessive desires, and even good men are driven to distraction because their minds are troubled all day long by obligations to business and political concerns. The country, on the other hand, is a place of contentment, independence, and the symposium, which entails wine, friendship, and philosophical *sermones*. It is an inherently more emancipating environment than the city, and countryfolk like Ofellus and the country mouse of 2.6’s renowned fable are possessed of a lifestyle and morality healthier than that of cityfolk. In these poems, Horace clearly announces his allegiance to the country and its associated values, and he establishes that his spiritual home is at his Sabine farm, which becomes in his poetry as emblematic of rural life as Rome, the capital of the empire, is of metropolitan life. The country, Horace implies, is the antidote to the ills of the city.

There is one poem in the *Epodes* (30 BC), the last collection Horace published before the *Odes*, in which the poet once more addresses the opposition between country and city life, this time in a way that interestingly undercuts and complicates the idyllic portrayal of the country in the second book of the *Satires*. This is *Ep.* 2, in which an urban moneylender named Alfius delivers an encomium of the farmer’s life, resolving to close his business and adopt the happy lifestyle of a *rusticus*—only to open up shop again two weeks later, helplessly betrayed by his love of money. The
poem begins:

Beatus ille qui procul negotiis,
    ut prisca gens mortalium,
paterna rura bohus exercet suis,
    solutus omni faenore
neque excitatur classico miles truci,
    neque horret iratum mare,
forumque vitat et suberba civium
    potentiorum limina.

Happy is he who, far from the affairs of business,
cultivates paternal fields with his own cattle
in the fashion of the first race of mankind,
unencumbered by any debt,
and who is not a soldier, aroused by the savage trumpet,
and does not fear the angry sea,
and avoids the forum and the haughty
thresholds of over-powerful citizens.

(1-8)

In these lines, the farmer is favorably contrasted with various other types of people—
the soldier, the sailor, and the urban cliens—and said to be free particularly of those
burdens which the narrator Alfius endures, the pressures of negotia (which can
literally be translated as money lending) and the debentures that are part of the
business. The farmer is untroubled by the worries of urban business, and he
comfortably abides in the safety of his farm, unafraid of life-threatening risks such as
those taken by the soldier and the sailor. The most interesting aspect, however, of
Alfius praise of agrarian life is its connection to the mythical past, the Golden Age of
the prisca gens mortalium (1). This turns out to be Alfius' most cherished belief
about the countryside, and his credent enthusiasm for its legendary easy living is
reflected throughout the rest of the poem. As in the Golden Age, the farmer tends his
crops and flocks with little effort, ministering to them in the capacity of an overseer
rather than that of a laborer (9-16)—for instance, he “weds” (maritat, 10) vines to supportive poplars as if he were merely officiating over a natural process, not painstakingly effecting it himself, and he passively “watches over” (prospectat, 12) his herds. In harvest time, the bounty of his fields is perfect and his days are full of leisure (17-28), and even in the dead of winter his gain is unabated as he enjoys the fruits of the hunt in the company of his loyal dogs (29-36). Alfius declares that in the midst of such bucolic bliss he would not long for the fancy delicacies prized in the city—the same as those described in Sat.2.2, imported from the East—but would content himself with the wholesome, humble fare of the country (49-66).

This reverent portrait that Alfius creates of the farmer and his carefree existence is strikingly similar to the myth of agrarian life presented by Virgil in the Eclogues and the Georgics (29 BC). The idea of the farmer as someone continuing a tradition inaugurated in the Golden Age is one of the central themes of the Georgics, the epic paean to agrarian life that intimates that the Golden Age of Saturn may still be live on in the farms and fields of Italy. Alfius’ encomiastic depiction of the farmer’s idyllic happiness also recalls the famous “fortunatus et ille” passage\textsuperscript{21} in book two of the Georgics, where Virgil renders in lush detail the bounty and beatitudinous case of ideal agrarian life; additionally, the emphasis on viticulture and arboriculture as duties of the rusticus explicitly recalls the elaborate passages devoted to such tendance elsewhere in Virgil’s treatise on farming. The rustic leisure enjoyed by the farmer during harvest season similarly resembles the repose of the Arcadian shepherds in the Eclogues; this reference to Virgil’s ideal pastoralism is further supported by Alfius’ deluded assertion that the pleasures of rustic life would obviate

\textsuperscript{21} Georgics 2.458-540
the pangs of disprized love and other such heartache, just as Gallus hopes for similar forgetfulness in the tenth eclogue. But although Alfius' portrait of ideal country life is reminiscent of Virgil's pastoralism—indeed directly refers to it at some points—it draws on the entire tradition of bucolic poetry, going back beyond Virgil all the way to Hesiod. In fact, the absolute condensation of so many classic bucolic motifs makes this poem a caricature of the tradition, even before the denouement that exposes the blithely assured narrator of the poem to be a hypocrite.

This second epode is a strange and fascinating poem. The charm of the farmer's life would seem an unqualified truth after Horace's endorsement of the countryside in Satires book two, but the hypocritical nature of Alfius' praise along with the references to Virgil's idealized, mythical portrayal of rusticity in the Eclogues and Georgics prompts one to wonder, as Commager does, "Does Horace express a genuine love of the country? Or is he satirizing the extravagantly fashionable praises it received?" The sheer impossibility of Alfius' vision of agrarian life suggests that his desire to move to the country is only a pipedream, and that his rejection of his fantasy at the end of the poem is the sensible action of a man facing the facts of life. Horace's clear valuation of the country over the city, however, refutes this conclusion. This poem is, after all, a condemnation of Alfius as a man whose urban values cause him to forsake his dreams of living peacefully in the country in exchange for the possibility of financial advancement—the very kind of unhealthy ambition Horace roundly denounced in the Satires.

What Horace accomplishes in Ep. 2 is a feat of quintessentially Horatian

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22 Ep.2.37-8: "Quis non malum quas amor curas habet/ haec inter obliviscitur?"

23 Commager, p. 107
sleight-of-hand, seemingly deviating from the position he has taught his readers to expect of him while simultaneously strengthening and clarifying that very same position. In the first book of the *Satires*, Horace established his view of the city by repeatedly rebuking the hypocrisies and harmful ambitions of people like Alfius, suggesting that theirs was the common morality of Rome and that their vices make them and their city miserable. In the second book, Horace presented the rural countryside, epitomized by his Sabine farm, as a place of contentment and refuge from the ills of the city. These two books introduce the reader to Horace’s dialectic of the country and the city, where each landscape has its own system of values and attributes—i.e. business and worry in Rome, simplicity and the symposium in the country. In the second *Epode*, however, the valences of this dialectic are turned topsy-turvy. The narrator, who one naturally assumes to be Horace until the unmasking at the end, and who espouses an appreciation for the country very similar to that in *Sat II*, turns out to be not only your typical urban hypocrite but moreover, as a usurer, a borderline criminal. This revelation casts Alfius’ encomium of the country, which was at first so beguiling and attractive, into a skeptical light—and rightly too, since a little scrutiny proves this imagining of the country to be untenable, a mere caricature of bucolic myths. The poem therefore seems to become a renunciation of the rural contentment promised in *Sat II* and a concession to the city as being the only reality, however harsh; Alfius was wise not to follow his dream, since it would have only disappointed. But *Ep 2* is not a renunciation; instead it is an elucidation of Horace’s stance. Alfius’ vision of rusticity is one that exists, as Wilkinson says, “only in theory”^{24} not in practice; its conception betrays the same kind of excess, or deviation

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^{24} Wilkinson, p. 165
from the rational mean, that Horace ascribes to all urban ambitions, and Alfius’ desire
to live in a Golden Age paradise is no different in terms of this deviation than his
eventual decision to remain in the city and pursue monetary gain at the expense of his
longed-for peace of mind. In this poem, Horace provides an example of the kind of
rustic contentment that he does not and cannot promise. In *Sat* II, the countryside is a
place of simple and eminently possible pleasures, like shade, water, and cheap wine;
unworked-for harvests and docile, self-reliant herds only exist in the field of myth and
magic, and Horace shows in *Ep* 2 that a desire for them is a species of urban escapist
fantasy. In the *Odes*, Horace continues to explore these themes with greater
complexity and detail, and he creates an intricate formulation of the real benefits the
country can afford an urbanite who is able to tear himself away from the city, as well
as the mystical boons it may bestow upon a poet who is sensitive to the world of
nature.

**The Odes**

The *Odes* are incontestably Horace’s finest artistic achievement. Countless
poets and scholars—not the least Horace himself—have celebrated the technical
virtuosity demonstrated in the *Odes*’ adaptation of ancient Greek meters for Latin
verse, and modern academics have thoroughly explicated the genre-savvy brilliance
in Horace’s resuscitation of ancient Greek lyric topoi for his invention of Roman lyric
poetry. For the purposes of this paper we shall consider these matters to be
sufficiently well illuminated and instead address ourselves to another, less deeply considered aspect of the work—Horace’s use of the language of nature and the countryside. In the myriad themes that populate the *Odes*, ranging from the Pindaric praise and blame of political figures to the more subdued and intimate expressions of love, the poet’s admiration of the countryside and the salutary values that, to him, it represents is continuously felt. These values consist, for the most part, of simple living, simple pleasures, and the moral sanity that arises from this earth-bound simplicity; they are the same values that Horace ascribes to the countryside in *Satires* II, where they are shown—personified by the *rusticus* Ofellus and exemplified by the Sabine farm—to be superior and more morally sound than the principles of the Roman *urbanus*, who prefers (useless) personal gain to peace of mind. In this way, the *Odes* are a continuation, or elaboration, of the characteristically Horatian theme first introduced in the *Satires*: the valuation of country morality over that of the city. In the *Odes*, however, Horace addresses this theme with a new, unprecedentedly complex voice that reveals the mellow fruit of his poetic maturity. The progression that led to this new voice is discernible in his preceding works: in *Satires* I, Horace’s poetry is that of an acerbic viewer of the urban scene, alive to all the ins and outs of Roman moral corruption; in *Satires* II, Horace continues to critique the city’s vices, but with the new contention that a moral remedy is to be found in the countryside and in agrarian life; in the *Epodes* he qualifies his endorsement of the countryside, still eulogizing agrarian life but also revealing that moon-eyed hopes of finding a Golden Age paradise in the country are unfounded in reality and are, at best, escapist fantasies. By the time of the publication of the *Odes*, Horace had lived in his Sabine
farm for a good ten years and was comfortably settled in his country life. He had experienced the changes of seasons in all their evocative splendor, became acquainted with his herds and fields, and learned firsthand about nature’s caprice when a falling tree nearly brought his versification to a premature end. It was from this vantage, securely rooted in the countryside, that Horace now continued in the *Odes* to advocate the benefits of country life and country values to his urban audience, always with the same message, familiar since the *Satires*, that it was preferable to their own. The countryside that Horace describes in the *Odes* is, however, an environment previously unexampled in classical literature. To be sure its conception draws upon the entire bucolic tradition from Hesiod to Virgil, along, as we shall see, with the descriptions of nature in ancient Greek lyric, but Horace’s unique manipulation and synthesis of his influences sets the *Odes* apart from its literary forbears as a work of innovative freshness that is far from derivative.

In the *Odes*, Horace creates a portrait of the countryside as a ‘spiritual’ landscape of remarkable variety, encompassing both real pleasures and contentment to be sought out and enjoyed in nature, and fantastic, mystical powers to be experienced through poetry alone. In order to understand the lay of Horace’s spiritual landscape and the idea of the countryside that underpins it, it is necessary to consider all of the ways that Horace presents the natural environment throughout the entirety of the *Odes*—the masterpiece of the first three books together with the subsequent fourth book, which continues in the same vein. Fortunately, there is a way to navigate this dauntingly broad poetic terrain through the use of a thematic map that Horace

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25 He received the farm c. 33 BC and published the *odes* in 23 BC.
26 Horace hilariously describes this incident in C.2.13.
provides in the first poem of the first book; as Eduard Fraenkel writes,

The prefatory ode, i.1, *Maecenas atavis edite regibus*, is probably one of the latest poems in the collection of the three books; a poet will hardly compose a proem until his work is near its completion. It is therefore not unlikely that most of the passages in this ode which remind us of passages in other odes are in fact deliberate echoes or variations of them and that *Maecenas atavis* is, in this respect too, a real ‘overture’ to the three books. 27

In this way, the first poem of the first book performs in much the same way as the first act of a Shakespearian play, presenting in miniature the themes to be explored throughout the rest of the oeuvre. By identifying the themes in this poem that regard the countryside, it is possible follow them individually through the collection without getting lost in the warp and weft of Horace’s daedalian complexity; in this way we will isolate these themes and concentrate on what each of them reveals about Horace’s portrayal of nature and the countryside. But first, and examination of 1.1 in its own right will provide a useful introduction to the tone of the *Odes* and the purposes of the collection as a whole.

Poem 1.1, addressed to Maecenas, is a priamel that runs like a catalogue through a number of different types of individuals, reviewing each one with a brief but telling appraisal until finally ending with a description of the poet himself in his new incarnation as lyric bard. The poem reads:

*Maecenas atavis edite regibus,*

*o et praesidium et dulce decus meum*

*sunt quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum*

*collegisse inuit metaque fervidis*

*evitata rotis palmaque nobilis*

*terrarum dominos evexit ad deos;*

*hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium*

*certat tergeminis tollere honoribus*

*illum, si proprio condidit horreo*

*quicquid de Libycis verritur areis.*

27 Fraenkel, p. 230
Gaudentem patrios findere sarculo
agros Attalicis condicionibus
numquam dimoveas, ut trabe
Cypria
Myrtoum pavidus nauta secet mare.
Luctantem lcariis jluctibus Africum
mercator metuens otium et oppidi
laudat rura suis; max reficit rates
quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati.
Est qui nee
yeteris
pocula Massici
nee partem solido demere de die
spernit, nunc viridi membra sub arbuto
stratus, nunc ad aquae lene caput sacrae.
Multos castra iuvant et lituo tubae
permixtus sonitus bellaque matribus
detestata. Manet sub love frigido
venator tenerae coniugis immemor,
seu visa est catulis cerva fidelibus,
seu rupit teretes Marsus aper plagas.
Me doctarum hedera praemia frontium
dis miscent superis, me gelidum nemus
Nympharumque !eves cum Satyris chori
cernunt populo, si neque tibias
Euterpe cohibet nee Polyhymnia
Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton.
Quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres,
sublimi feriam sidera vertice. 28
Maecenas descended from ancient
kings,
0
both my shield and sweet pride,
there are those who thrill to collect
Olympic dust on a chariot, and the turning
points evaded on burning wheels and then
the noble palm raise them, masters of the
earth, to the gods;
this
man ifthe crowd
of erratic Romans strives to raise
him
to
the triple honors, that one if
in
his
own
silo he hoards everything hauled off from
the Libyan fields. The
man
rejoicing to
hew his paternal fields with a little hoe
you could never lure away, even for the
terms of an Attalus, to cut across the
Myrtoan sea with a Cyprian plank,
a fretful sailor. The merchant, fearing
the African wind wrestling with the Icarian
waves, praises the leisure and countryside
28
All translations from the Latin are my own.
of his home town; soon he again prepares
the battered vessel, untaught to endure poverty.
There is one who does not disdain cups of
vintage Massican, nor to take off a part
from the business day, sometimes with his limbs
outstretched beneath a green arbutus tree,
sometimes by a gentle spring of sacred waters.
Many enjoy the camps and the sound of the
trumpet mixed with the cavalry’s horn, and
wars cursed by mothers. The hunter, unmindful
of his tender wife, lies in wait under an icy Jove
for whether a deer is spied by his faithful hounds
or a Marsian boar bursts the fine-spun nets.
Ivy, the prize of learned brows, mingles me
with the gods above, and the cool grove and
light-footed choruses of Nymphs and Satyrs
separate me from the populace, if Euterpe
does not withhold the pipes, nor Polyhymnia
demure to tune the Lesbian lyre. But if you
would place me among the lyric bards,
I will knock my lofty sconce against the stars.

In this exquisitely crafted poem Horace accomplishes three discrete agendas,
each vitally important to the collection, with tact, precision, and inspired gem-like
artistry. In the first two lines, Horace acknowledges his very real indebtedness to his
patron, without whose solicitations and gifts the Odes could never have been
composed. Beginning with the flattering gesture of positioning Maecenas’ name as
the first word, Horace then interestingly bestows his patron with an epithet—“o both
my shield and sweet pride”—unmistakably similar to that given him by Virgil in the
Georgics, “o pride and truly the greatest part of my fame”29 This allusion subtly links
Horace with Virgil as the two happy dependants of the same patron and, by
redoubling Horace’s praise with the echo of that of his greatest peer, it must have
been a pleasant reminder to Maecenas of his status as an extraordinary sponsor of the
arts, as well as his of acumen in choosing two so worthy poets. More subtly still, in

29 Georgics II. 40: o decus, o famae merito pars maxima nostrae
uniting his voice with that of his fellow cliens Horace suggests that there are perhaps similarities between himself and Virgil that go beyond just sharing a patron—that they are kindred poets, and that furthermore there is a consonance between the Odes and the Georgics. This consonance, it will turn out, is very real and resides significantly in the way that Horace portrays agrarian life and nature in general in the Odes.

In addition to giving this intricate and necessary tribute to Maecenas a position of importance, Horace also uses 1.1 as an occasion to introduce his new poetic persona as the “Romanae fidicen lyrae”\(^{30}\)—the lyric poet of the Roman lyre—who has revived the meters and themes of old Greek lyric and invented a medium of Latin lyric poetry contoured to receive them. This announcement is first hinted at in the clever poetic feint of lines 3-6, where Horace pretends to launch into a Pindaric salute to the victorious athlete—one of the classic topics of Greek lyric—only to shift quickly to address another character in the index of the priamel. It is most explicitly stated, however, towards the end of the poem, when in line 34 he declares his poetry to be reliant upon the Lesbian lyre (Lesboun . . . barbiton, 34) the instrument used by all Greek lyric poets to accompany their poetry but specifically the twin lyric poets of Lesbos, Sappho and Alcaeus; here Horace both indicates his decision to write lyric poetry, as well as citing two of his favorite Greek poets whose style and meters he emulates in the Odes. For our purposes, however, the most important element of the “overture” in 1.1 is the preview of the Odes' thematic spectrum that Horace embeds in the priamel.

In the course of 1.1, Horace acquaints the reader with nine characters: the

\(^{30}\) C.4.3.23
Olympic athlete, the politician, the rich landowner, the modest farmer, the merchant, the symposiast, the soldier, the hunter, and himself, the lyric poet. Although their descriptions are brief, usually two to four lines apiece, Horace words each portrait with such economy and precision that the individual descriptions of the characters not only succeed in bringing them to life but also in reflecting the poet's judgement on the kind of life they lead. For instance, the charioteer of lines 3-6, is described as an Olympic hero, born to the heavens by his victory; however, the diminution of the athlete's heroic feat into a process of collecting ephemeral and morbid dust suggests that no matter how much the gods may venerate athletic prowess, Horace reserves his enthusiasm for other areas of endeavor. Like this athlete, whose dust-gathering suggests the futility of human ambition, each character in the priamel functions as a scaled down Horatian archetype, embodying a particular lifestyle or attitude towards life that will again and again be addressed in the Odes. Furthermore, since one of the paramount thematic concerns of the Odes is the proper way to live—as in the Satires, where most of these characters were first introduced—the different lifestyles embodied by these characters reflect certain themes that Horace weaves through the collection. Not all of his themes, of course—there is no mention of Augustus, whose politics and achievements inspire a considerable number of Horace's odes, nor even mention of Roman politics at all aside from the brief and unflattering sketch of the politician in lines 6-7, whose success is described as dependent upon the "mob of fickle Romans" (mobilium turba Quiritum, 7)—which, knowing our poet's opinion of

31 Cf. C.4.7.16: pulvis et umbra sumus is an oft-quoted line demonstrating Horace's association of dust with the insignificance of human life in the face of time and mortality.
the mob from the satires, \textsuperscript{32} is far from an endorsement. It is significant that in this foundational "overture" Horace says nothing specific about Roman politics, nothing about the Civil Wars or the new \textit{principate}. Although the second poem of the first book is a panegyric ode to Augustus that seriously regards the matters of the state, and earnest poems of this type appear throughout the \textit{Odes}, the fact that Horace says nothing about politics in the inaugural poem reflects his characteristic reluctance to write political poetry; that he does write brilliant political odes is testimony to the breadth of his poetic vision and his conscious stature as one of the great voices of the Roman people, but one gets the feeling from some of the poems that he has a natural preference to compose a different kind of poetry. In 1.6, for instance, Horace writes a \textit{recusatio} to the famous general Agrippa where he declines to write a poem celebrating victorious military leaders because:

\begin{quote}
\textit{pudor}
\begin{verbatim}
imbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat
laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas
culpa deterere ingenii.
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

\textit{shame}

and the Muse commanding the unwarlike lyre forbid me to disgrace the praises of magnificent Caesar and yourself with my faulty talent.

(9-12)

Although in the typical fashion of the \textit{recusatio} Horace does end up writing the poem he refuses to write—his confession that he is too poor a poet to celebrate such a glorious victory is praise in itself—but, as is often the case in Horace, the \textit{recusatio} indeed does signal a real disinclination on the poet's part to fulfill what's asked of him; this disinclination to write political and martial poetry is consistent, as we shall

\textsuperscript{32} Cf C.3.1.1: \textit{odi profanum vulgus et arceo}. 

25
see, with Horace’s overall distaste for politics.

The poetry that Horace does find most naturally congenial to his temperament is moral poetry, and therefore it is not surprising that 1.1 concerns the right way to live and the pursuit of happiness. Also, since 1.1 is an ode addressed to his patron, it is an expected place for Horace to emphasize the tenets of his poetic philosophy and unique personality that Maecenas found so agreeable. Horace, however, refrains from etching his heart so clearly on his sleeve, or introducing his poetic voice in a facile way that would misrepresent the diversity of his poetry. Instead, in his typically oblique fashion, he displays a carefully chosen group of nine individual characters and invites the reader to appraise them, to move through their ranks and judge their moral fitness in the way that Horace taught us to do in the *Satires*, and before that his father taught him. It is no coincidence that the characters who pass this muster and appear to be contented in their way of life are all denizens of the countryside. These characters are the farmer, the symposiast, and Horace himself, the lyric poet. Throughout the *Odes* each of these three personae are represented as being content with their lot in life, and their contentment is always shown to be derived from their distinctive and intimate relationship with nature. Since the *Odes*, like all of Horace’s works, are largely devoted to the theme of personal contentment, these three characters function as the moral protagonists of the *Odes* as a whole, the models that Horace provides as examples of contented living. Throughout the collection, these personae and the specific attitude toward nature that they represent repeatedly appear as in a fugue—sometimes alone, sometimes emerging in combination with one another, with their presence in a poem always signaling the presence of their
characteristic theme. Sometimes Horace places one of these characters briefly into a poem to introduce their theme and then moves off to address a different topic. Other times, however, Horace devotes an entire poem to one of their individual themes. In these latter poems, the poet frequently assumes the voice of one of these characters, like a mask for the duration of a poem and addresses the issues of the poem from the perspective of that character’s theme; it is in these poems where it is most possible to apprehend the nature of these characters and their themes. This is a useful exercise, for an understanding of what they enjoy about the countryside, and what benefits they reap from its environment, yields an overall understanding of Horace’s unique idea of contentment: how it’s to be attained and why it resides in the country, away from the city of Rome.

The Farmer

The first of these characters mentioned in 1.1 who reveals himself to be a Horatian model is the farmer. In the Odes, the farmer functions as the genius of the countryside, the native of the landscape who embodies the rustic values that come from country living. Sometimes portrayed as tending flocks in the manner of a pastor, as previously seen in Theocritus’ Idyls and the Eclogues of Virgil, sometimes

33 "When he turned to composing the Odes, [Horace] shaped, for the three books that would make up his first lyric collection, a series of masks" W.R. Johnson, Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom, p. 10
as the tiller of the earth celebrated in the *Georgics*, Horace’s farmer always works in direct contact with nature, producing his livelihood with real labor and admirable self-sufficiency. In 1.1, Horace introduces this persona with the following description:

\[
\textit{Gaudentem patrios findere sarculo} \\
\textit{agros Attalicis condicionibus} \\
\textit{numquam dimoveas, ut trabe Cypria} \\
\textit{Myriotum pavidus nauta secet mare.} \\
\textit{(11-14)}
\]

The most prominent aspect of this portrait, emphasized by the dramatic positioning of \textit{gaudentem} (11), is that the farmer is happy with his lot—he literally rejoices to work his ancestral fields, passed down to him by his father. Unlike the athlete, politician, and wealthy hoarder who precede him, the farmer is content. One reason for this contentment is contained in the idea of the \textit{patrios \ldots agros} (11-12).

The immediate response that the phrase \textit{patrios agros} elicits from an alert reader of Horace is to recollect that the poet’s own paternal fields had been stripped away from him in the confiscations after Phillipi. No doubt there is a powerful element of nostalgia, in Horace’s description of the farmer happily administering to his family farm since the character is experiencing a satisfaction impossible for the poet; the farm procured for him by Maecenas lacks the history and sentimental value of his old Venusian homestead, where the same land had been most likely been tended by generations of Flacci. But the ancestry that Horace evokes with \textit{patrios agros} is more than just that of his own family. It is the ancestry of the Roman people, sprawling back from the time of the burgeoning empire to the halcyon days of the
Republic, and before that, the mythic Golden Age of Hesiod. The farmer is the one continuous link between all of these ages, working the same Italian fields from time immemorial with the same proven tools and earth-bound virtues of hard work and self-sufficiency. In 3.6, a polemical ode indicting the moral corruption that he sees in the debauched excesses of Rome, Horace conjures up this ancient farmer as an example of rectitude that the Roman people must imitate if they are to withstand the encroachment of their powerful foreign enemies who, perched on the verge of invasion, are ready to take advantage of any weakness. After describing the moral degradation he perceives in the Roman people, Horace says:

Non his iuventus orta parentibus
infecit aequor sanguine Punico
Pyrrhumque et ingentem cecedit
Antiochum Hannibalemque dirum;

sed rusticorum mascula militum
proles, Sabellis docta ligonibus
versare glaebas et severae
matris ad arbitrium recisos

portare fustis, sol ubi montium
mutaret umbras et iuga demeret
bobus fatigas, amicum
tempus agens abeunte curru.

Not from such parents as these did the youths arise who stained the seas with Punic blood and felled Pyrrhus, great Antiochus, and fierce Hannibal;

they were the manful issue of farmer soldiers, taught to till the soil with a Sabine hoe, and carry firewood, cut down at the command of an austere mother, as the sun would change the shadows of the mountains.
and release the exhausted cattle from the yoke,
bringing on the friendly hour with its chariot's departure.

(33-44)

In this passage, Horace explicitly invokes the traditional farmer soldier of the Republic, eulogized by Cato as the bulwark of Roman morality\textsuperscript{34} and exemplified in myth by the legendary general Cincinnatus. The implication that Horace conveys in saying the farmers of antiquity were manlier than the Romans of his day is telling; he is not comparing the farmers of the past with the farmers of the Augustan age, but rather with the debauched citizens of the city who are condemned earlier in the poem. In this ode, Horace equates the moral infirmity of the city, as seen in the \textit{Satires}, with physical and martial weakness; the \textit{urbanus} has corrupted values and therefore is too weak to defend his country. The \textit{rusticus}, on the other hand, acquires manliness and military fortitude from his hard work on the farm and, as a result of his rigorous upbringing under the eye of a nobly strict mother, he can “cut down” (\textit{cecidit}, 35) firewood and hostile foreign kings with the same ease. As the weakness of the citydweller is caused by the moral debility that is endemic in the city, the farmer’s strength is acquired, it is suggested, not only through hard work on a farm but from the morally edifying influence of the countryside. In this way Horace portrays the country as an environment that has inherently salubrious effect on morality antithetical to the corrupting influence of the city; the farmer is proof of this influence and the avatar of the strong values of the countryside. Whenever Horace mentions the farmer’s paternal lands in the \textit{Odes} or alludes to the farmer’s ancestry he is evoking this connection to the past and the agrarian heritage of manly hardihood as well as the moral virtue of country living.

\textsuperscript{34} Johnson, \textit{Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom} p. 50-53
In 1.1 Horace establishes another significant aspect of the farmer’s character through his juxtaposition with the merchant; the opposition between the values of these two characters is recurrent thematic device in the Odes, and it serves to establish the prudent steadfastness of the farmer and the security of life in the countryside by contrast with the foolish inconstancy of the merchant and the jeopardy represented by the sea. This opposition is introduced in 1.1, where the portrait of the farmer is immediately followed by this description of a merchant:

*Luctantem Icaris fluctibus Africum
mercator metuens otium et oppidi
laudat rura suis; max reficit rates
quassas, indocolis pauperiem pati.*

(15-19)

The dominant characteristic of the merchant, as seen in the lines above, is his foolhardy inconstancy. When captive on a stormy sea, he longs for leisure and the countryside—in other words, the peaceful life the farmer enjoys—but as soon as his wish is granted and he is safely back on land he is swayed, like Alfius, by his need for profit to forgo his chance at a peaceful life; at once he again commits himself to the perils of the sea, only to repeat the same unsatisfying cycle. Unlike the farmer, who has a deep-rooted connection to the land and who is continuing in a tradition he received from his father and will pass onto his son, the desires of the merchant are as subject to change as the sea that he crosses—in safety he wants to risk his life for material gain and when at risk he wants safety, back and forth like an everflowing tide. Moreover, just as the farmer receives his virtue from working with the earth, the merchant learns his recklessness from the sea, acquiring the volatility that it represents. In the Odes, Horace consistently employs the sea as a metaphor for
malevolent chance and the kind of risk-taking that prudent men should avoid; for instance, in 1.5 Horace compares the favor of Pyrrha, a woman who goes through lovers at a heartbreaking speed, to a “sea cruel with black winds.” The merchant, as the embodiment of this risk-taking, constantly places his well being out of his own control and into the realm of danger and unpredictability. In the schema of the Odes, the merchant’s addiction to risk is not only foolhardy but impious. As Horace writes in 1.3:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nequiquam deus abscidit} \\
\text{prudens Oceano dissociabili} \\
\text{terras, si tamen impiae} \\
\text{non tangenda rates transilunt vada} \\
\text{Audax omnia perpeti} \\
\text{gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas.}
\end{align*}
\]

In vain did our prudent god
sunder the lands with divisive
Ocean, if impious boats still
lope across the not-to-be-touched depths.

Perpetually defying everything,
the race of man rushes into forbidden crime.
(21-26)

For Horace, the transgression of natural boundaries is the greatest offense. In poems like 1.11, the carpe diem poem, and others that proclaim the value of living in the here and now, Horace repeatedly warns of the danger—“scire nefas”—of attempting to know the future that the gods justly conceal from human eyes. In 1.3, Horace ascribes a similar taboo-quality to braving the sea, or the sphere of reckless chance, that was placed by divine judgement as a barrier for man’s own good; the sea,
i.e. fortune, is dangerously indiscriminate with its destructive forces and therefore
man—who should try and keep bouts with chance to a minimum, even though they
are inevitable—should keep on the land, where his fate is more securely in his own
hands. For this reason the boat that carries a man over the depths is impious (impiae .
. . rates, 23-24; compare quassas rates in 1.1.17-18), and the man who willfully puts
out to sea for no good reason is a moral outlaw, the defier of the gods and his own
best interest. The merchant, Horace’s paragon of this defiance, is here antipodal to
the farmer—the former routinely transgresses nature for his living, while the latter
works in accordance with nature on a firm plot of solid earth. The merchant,
furthermore, ventures onto the seas in the pursuit of wealth, because he is “untaught
to endure” (indocilis pauperiam pati, 18) the poverty that would come with a
peaceful, settled agrarian life.

This brings us to the farmer’s poverty. Horace’s contented farmer is not a
wealthy landowner or proprietor of a latifundium like the character described in line
9-10, who hoards more grain than he could ever use.37 Instead, Horace subtly
specifies in 1.1 that his contented farmer is poor; the ancestral fields he tends are not
lush and fertile but rather workable only with difficulty—he must split (findere, 11)
the hardened earth with a hoe to ready the soil for planting, since it is too dry to use
the plow effectively. The crop that this land yields would be abundant enough to
provide the farmer with little more than his sustenance and perhaps a small profit,
certainly not wealth. Despite these meager holdings, however, the farmer in 1.1
would not exchange his lot with a sailor even for a bribe of riches comparable to the
wealth of Attalus (Attalicis condicionibus, 12); in this way, the farmer’s values differ

37 illum, si proprio condidit horreo/ quicquid de Libycis verritur areis. Compare Sat.1.1.49-56
antipodally from the merchant’s, since he would never risk the danger of the open seas even for a guaranteed fortune while the merchant routinely risks his life for the uncertain revenue of his profession. That the farmer values peace of mind over wealth is his typically Horatian characteristic, and the fact that the merchant’s recklessness comes from his affinity to the sea implies that the farmer’s prudence, stability, and immunity to the dangerous allure of wealth are reflective of the simple country life from which he takes his identity. One poem in which Horace addresses this theme of the farmer’s unconcern for wealth, and indeed the theme of the farmer in general, is 2.16, an ode that he writes from the poetic locus of his Sabine farm, in the adopted voice of a rusticus.

Otium divos rogat in patenti
prensus Aegaeo, simul atra nubes
condit lunam neque certa fulgent
sidera nautis;

otium bello furiosa Thrace,
otium Medi pharetra decori,
Grosphe, non gemmis neque purpura venale nec auro.

Non enim gazae neque consularis
summovel lictor miseris tumultus
mentis et curas laqueata circum tecta volantis.

Vivitur parvo bene, cui paternum splendet in mensa tenui salinum
nec levis somnos timor aut cupidio sordidus auffert.

Quid brevi fortes iaculamur aevo multa? Quid terras alio calentis sole mutamus? Patriae quis exsul se quoque fugit?
Caught in the sprawling Aegean, a man asks the gods for leisure, as soon as dark clouds bury the moon and the assuring stars no longer shine for sailors;

leisure asks the Thracian, so frenzied in war, Parthians, ornamented with quivers, ask for leisure too, Grosphus, that is not purchasable with jewels, purple, or gold.

For neither riches nor a consul’s lictor may ward off the miserable tumult of the mind and the cares flying around paneled ceilings.

He lives well on a little, whose father’s salt-cellar shines on a modest table; fear and sordid greed do not bear away his light sleep.

Why do we stalwarts hurl so many
spears in our brief time? Why do we change lands, warmed by a different sun? What exile from his fatherland has fled himself as well?

Corrupt care climbs onto bronzed ships and it does not desert troops of cavalry; it is swifter than deer, swifter than the east wind driving the clouds.

The mind happy in the present should hate to worry about what comes next and should temper bitterness with a calm laugh. Nothing is happy from all angles.

A quick death stole away famous Achilles, a long old age diminished Tithonus, and time may perhaps offer me what it refuses you.

A hundred flocks and Sicilian cattle low around you, a horse apt for a four-horse chariot raises a whinny for you, wool dyed twice with purple African shellfish clothes you; to me an honest Fate has given a little farm, the modest breath of a Greek Camena, and the ability to scorn the jealous mob.

This poem begins with a benediction of *otium*—a word I have translated simply as “leisure,” but which Nisbet and Hubbard define in a lengthy yet more precise phrasing as “the leisure needed for innocent enjoyment, particularly in the country.” 

This is certainly an apt description of the way Horace uses the word in the *Odes*—in 1.1, where the idea is introduced with the merchant who longs for *otium* while caught in a storm, the word *otium* is paired almost in a hendiadys with *rura* (*otium et oppidi . . . rura suis*, 16-17), suggesting from the first the thematic connection between the countryside and leisure. In 2.16, Horace expands upon this

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38 Nisbet and Hubbard, p. 253
idea of rural leisure by addressing how it is to be attained.

In his poetry, it is Horace's oblique tendency to define the concepts that are nearest and dearest to his heart only through antithesis and never directly; such was the case when in 3.6 he portrayed the morally edifying quality of the countryside only by contrast with the corruption of the city. In this poem Horace's approach is no different—he defines the idea of *otium* through the descriptions of individuals who long for it, and the nature of *otium* is conveyed through the consonance of what they all lack in their lives. The poem begins with the portrait of the merchant on the high seas longing for leisure, as seen originally in 1.1, and then continues into a description of two bellicose peoples who also long for *otium*; the similarity between these categories of individuals is apparent—they both relinquish control over their lives on a regular basis, the former on the treacherous seas and the latter in the waging of war. The *otium* they long for—the thing absent in both ways of life—must therefore be safety and peace of mind. Horace then explains that neither the merchant nor the warmongers can buy leisure, and the peace of mind that comes with it, with wealth, the hoped-for reward of their excessive risk-taking; he then adds the further criterion that leisure cannot be gained through political influence either, since not even the lictor of a consul, the symbol of the greatest political power in the land, can chase away worries. Instead, Horace suggests, the requirements for peace of mind are not of wealth and influence, but humble living (*vivitur parvo bene*, 13).

In this ode, Horace significantly enlarges upon the idea of humble living; it is not only necessary for a man to be a farmer to experience *otium*, he must furthermore be a poor farmer. This distinction is conveyed in the last three stanzas, where Horace
contrasts himself with Grosphus, the addressee of the ode and an affluent Sicilian landholder. Horace describes his friend as possessing a wealth of herds—more than he could ever possibly tend himself or even keep track of—and a horse of exceptional quality; for himself, the poet claims only a small farm, a unique strain of poetry, and a disdain for the masses. The contrast is obvious: Grosphus, as a rich man, is of the same breed as the wealthy and powerful men whose money and influence Horace shows earlier in the poem to be useless in the pursuit of *otium*, and even in fact detrimental since *Cura* has a predilection for the trappings of wealth, such as lacquered ceilings (*laqueata . . . tecta*, 11-12). Horace, on the other hand, received his small farm from an honest Fate (*parca non mendax*, 39)—implying that Grosphus’ rich farm was given to him by a ‘lying’ Fate, appearing to provide him with contentment by giving him material prosperity but really only giving him additional worries.

The world of business, as Horace conceives of it, is the world of the merchant; the businessman is always in over his head, beset by worries stemming from his excessive fixation on financial gain, just as the sea that the merchant crosses in the pursuit of profit batters his ship and peace of mind. The politician, excessively fixated on political advancement, is coupled with the businessman as a type of person troubled by the pressures of his ambition, and, as L.P. Wilkinson writes, “the pomp of office [has] no more value than wealth for the great object of life, the banishment of care.”39 Rome, being the center of the political and mercantile world, is naturally the center of *negoitium* and as such is also the nexus of the anxiety and discontent that come with it; this characterization is consistent with the urban landscape that Horace

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39 Wilkinson, p. 82
defined in the *Satires*. The countryside, on the other hand, is the locus of *otium*, which is necessarily antithetical to *negotium* in the Roman mind as the language itself indicates—neg-*otium* being, of course, the absence of *otium*. Therefore Horace’s poor farmer embodies a system of values that precisely countervails the values of the urban businessman, since he works in the country and does not concern himself with the pursuit of material profit, which is not even a possibility in his humble profession. This is why poverty is a necessary characteristic of the Horace’s contented farmer.

To understand what poverty means in the *Odes* and in the context of the dialectic between the country and the city, it must be remembered that Horace was no St. Theresa, preaching the virtues of poverty to the starving. The audience of his poetry was the very cream of Roman society, containing wealthy knights, like Grosphus and Maecenas, and Horace himself was certainly not destitute thanks to the largesse of his patron. The poverty that Horace includes as a characteristic of his happy farmer is suggestive more of humility and an independence from the worries money and status bring than actual fiscal insolvency; the farmer always has enough, earned through his self-sufficiency, to legitimately scorn wealth from the comfort of his simple life. In 3.1, an ode on tranquility, Horace writes, again in the voice of the farmer:

> *cur invidendis postibus et novo*  
> *sublime ritu moliar atrium?*  
> *Cur valle permutem Sabina*  
> *divitias operiosoress?*  

why should I erect a lofty atrium with pillars and a modern style prime for envying?  
Why would I exchange my Sabine valley for more laborious riches?
In Horace’s view, as is shown in the above lines, the possession and display of wealth is both an invitation for envy and a taxing burden on the rich man himself. Each of these qualities is a powerful deterrent from the pursuit of financial gain, but the idea that wealth incites envy is one that especially bothers Horace; to the poet, envy is something that should be discouraged and avoided at all costs. In this poem, Horace describes the preening features of the rich man’s villa (which he rejects) as invidendis (45), or “there for being envied”—meaning, in context, that they are the kind of elaborations the wealthy install to impress their friends. Envy, however, always has a larger significance in Horace’s poetry than simply a mild response to vanity or accomplishment. Since the days of the Civil Wars, when wealthy Romans would be added to the list of proscriptions simply on account of their attractive property, it was surely observed that, in Rome, courting envy could be tantamount to putting one’s head in a noose. Furthermore, the assassination of Julius Caesar—the epitome of a man who flaunted his station too much and strove to be too ordinary—must have taught prudent Romans that such ostentation could lead to devastating reprisals, or, as Horace says, that “high towers collapse with the heaviest plunge and lightning strikes the peaks of mountains.”

To Horace, this reciprocity is gospel truth. All things conspire to ruin the man whose ambition makes him strike too large a figure, and, as Horace always prizes safety and peace in the Odes over wealth and might, he writes, “I have learned to fear raising my head to be widely seen.”

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40 C.2.10.10-12: celsae graviore casu/ decidunt turres feriuntque summos/ fulgura montis
41 C.3.16.13-19: late conspicuum tollere verticem
too exposed to chance, the gods, or other supernatural forces of reciprocity, but that he fears to be too widely seen—seen, it is implied, by other people, the Roman masses: the mob. To Horace, the mob represents (and perhaps embodies) the worst qualities of human nature. In the *Satires*, much of the poet’s criticism is directed against these unruly masses; they are inconstant, faithless, and composed as a body of countless importunate schemers—each of them just like the bore in *Sat.* 1.9—who envy anyone who accomplishes something exceptional or enjoys a more successful lifestyle than they do, and they will always try to break off a piece of his success for themselves. It is for this reason that Horace ends the list in 2.16 of the humble gifts received from his *parca non mendax* (39) with the grateful statement that she has allowed him to despise the envious mob—as a simple farmer, he has no fear of being bothered by requests for handouts or the resentment that envy inculcates in the less well off. Furthermore, unlike the businessman who depends upon the consumer or the politician upon the voter, the farmer has no need to rely on the whims of the populace for anything, since he fulfills his needs with his own hands, working his own land. And unlike Grosphus with his hundred flocks, the small farmer enjoys a life of leisure and peace untroubled by the upkeep of so large a holding.

With his paternal lands and his poverty, Horace’s farmer enjoys a contentment that is unattainable in the city because he possesses an independence from the anxieties that pollute Rome, a city overwhelmed by the burdens of wealth and power. The little plot of land, inherited from a long line of noble ancestors, provides the farmer with sovereignty from the world’s concerns and the personal independence needed to be fully human—self-reliant, productive, and content. Though this
character's values and contentment, Horace describes the landscape of the
countryside as a place where moderate living can flourish—although excess can be
found there too, as seen in the character of Grosphus; as the poet says: *Nihil est ab
omni parte beatum* (27-28)—and where leisure and peace of mind can be enjoyed.
Horace elaborates on this quality of rustic leisure in the character of the symposiast,
or the epicure.

### The Symposiast

When one thinks fondly of the *Odes*, and Horace in general, more often than
not the poems that come to mind are those written in voice of the symposiast. In these
poems, which are the most common in the collection to address the idea of nature and
the country, Horace employs his most pleasant convivial tone, endorsing the moral
virtue of the countryside by emphasizing the pleasures to be found there—working to
persuade the reader in the same way that “coaxing teachers sometimes give cookies to
little boys, so that they might learn their alphabet.”¹⁴² In addition to being a pleasant
character, however, the symposiast also contributes the most significant perspective
on the countryside in the *Odes*, a perspective that is felt in the majority of poems that
address the natural world. With the character of the symposiast, Horace establishes
the countryside in the *Odes* as the site of Epicurean contentment, providing pleasures
and moral examples of behavior that are not to be found in the city.

¹⁴² *Sat.1.1.25-6: ut pueris olim dant crustula blandi doctores, elementa velint ut discere prima*
In 1.1, Horace introduces the symposiast with the description:

Est qui nec veteris pocula Massici
nec partem solido demere de die
spernit, nunc viridi membra sub arbuto
stratus, nunc ad aquae lene caput sacrae.

There is one who does not disdain cups of vintage Massican, nor to take off a part from the business day, sometimes with his limbs outstretched beneath a green arbutus tree, sometimes by a gentle spring of sacred waters.

(19-22)

The first two details Horace presents in this portrait are that the man described has a fondness for wine and that he has no qualms in taking a break during the business day. As to the significance of the latter, we have already seen the poet’s disdain for business in the discussion of his portrayal of the farmer, and his preference for *otium* over *negotium*; the symposiast shares these values. He is a character who enjoys leisure over business and whose desire for pleasure furthermore supersedes, if not negates, his ambitions for profit. His enjoyment of vintage wine (*veteris pocula Massici, 19*), provides another significant indication of his values. To begin with, his preference for old wine suggests an affinity for things of the past and old ways of life and, as we have seen with the farmer’s ancestral farm, in the *Odes* the past is a source of moral integrity. More importantly, however, his fondness for wine is an indication of his connection to the symposium.

In ancient literature, tracing all the way back the heroes’ banquets in Homer, the symposium is a traditional festive occasion devoted to the pleasures of wine (the Greek term literally means “drinking together”), communality and friendship, and love. Much of Greek lyric poetry is sympotic in nature and was originally intended to
be sung on the occasion of symposia, where the poet added flair to the festivities by singing drinking songs and ribald songs of love; Alcaeus, Horace’s favorite lyric poet, has a large repertoire of these drinking songs, while the *Anacreonta*, the collection of poems attributed to Anacreon, is almost entirely devoted to light-hearted sympotic lyric. In the *Odes*, Horace continues this tradition of sympotic lyric poetry, but with a number of significant modifications. While symposia in Greek lyric are typically indoor, domestic events, the symposia in the *Odes* are repeatedly depicted as outdoor parties set in the natural environs of the countryside. This association of the symposium and the country is, as we shall see, is an integral part of Horace’s overall depiction of the countryside. Before we evaluate this association, however, it is necessary to first understand Horace’s portrayal of the symposium in the *Odes*.

Like the Greek lyricists, Horace depicts the symposium as a drinking party where revelers anoint themselves with fragrant unguents and drink considerable quantities of wine. In addition, however, Horace also applies a symbolic valence to the symposium that is not always seen in his Greek influences—throughout the collection, he uses wine (which is always a synecdoche for the symposium in the *Odes*) and the symposium proper as expressions of the embracing of life and the affirmation of the individual self through pleasure. In the *Odes*, the symposiast is the votary of the symposium’s values, and in his poems he always either invites the addressee to a symposium or encourages him or her to adopt a symposiastic way of life; the case that he typically makes for the addressee to accept the invitation is that we only live once, and briefly, and therefore should devote ourselves to the avoidance of worry and be sure to allow time for the pursuit of happiness. Nowhere does
Horace conveys this message better than through the voice of the symposiast in 1.11, the famous *carpe diem* ode:


You should not seek out—it is forbidden to know it—what end the gods have allotted me or you, Leuconoe, nor should you consult Babylonian numerology. How much better to endure whatever will be, whether winters still remain or if Jupiter ordained this one as the last, which now weakens the Tyrrhenian sea with opposing pumice. Be wise, strain the wine and cut back long hope into a brief span. While we speak, envious time will have already fled: pluck the day, trusting as little as possible to the future.

In this poem Horace expresses one of the central tenets of his poetic philosophy in a powerfully condensed form. Knowledge of the future out of man’s reach, Horace says, and one should neither worry excessively about the inevitability of death, nor trouble oneself by investing one’s ambitions in long-term projects that disregard the fact the unpredictable and ineluctable approach of death, that can come at any time. As usual, Horace instead advocates a middle ground between the two mentalities; in view of death’s inevitability, he tells Leuconoe to be practical (*sapias*, 6) and exchange her ambitions of happiness in the uncertain future (*spem longam*, 7) for the pleasure and happiness that she can enjoy in the time that’s at hand, in the moment, the day, or the occasion (*spatio brevi*, 6). The form of pleasure that Horace then advocates Leuconoe to seek is the pleasure of the symposium, telling her to
“strain the wine” (vina liques, 7) to prepare it for drinking. But Horace is encouraging Leuconoe to enjoy more than just a literal symposium. The expressions and terminology that he uses in the paraenesis at the end of the poem are derived from the tendance of grape vines, the source of the wine central to the symposium—“reseces” is a verb that technically applies to the pruning of vines\(^{43}\), while “carpe” means to pluck, or harvest, the fruit of a plant. By telling Leuconoe to prune her ambitions like a overgrown vine and to pluck the day like a grape—that it is a grape is implied by the vine imagery that proceeds it—Horace is suggesting that living in the moment is analogous to the preparation of wine, and that the reward of such a life is not only the enjoyment an intimate, literal symposium with him on the occasion of the poem, but also a more abstract, spiritual symposium where the individual perpetually revels in the enjoyment of life itself, fully cognizant of the preciousness of its brief span. In Horace’s estimation, this method of living in the moment is the only certain way to guarantee contentment in a life naturally prey to unpredictable changes and sudden death.

In the poems dominated by the theme of the symposiast, the fact that Horace equates contentment with the enjoyment of the symposium betrays a markedly Epicurean sentiment. Epicureanism, the atomist philosophy founded by the Greek philosopher Epicurus around the turn of the third century BC, is centered on the belief that there is no providential god guiding the universe, and that man therefore is obliged to seek happiness on his own, without trusting to the favorable intervention of divinities. As a result, Epicureans follow a moral code that is derived from an empirical approach to reality, where the goal of the philosophically considered life is

\(^{43}\) N&H, p. 141
the enjoyment of personal pleasure—in Epicurus' words, "We say that pleasure is the beginning and the end of living happily." The Epicurean conception of pleasure is not, however, found in debauchery or unconsidered hedonism, but instead in simple enjoyments that are easily attainable and moderate in their expression. To Epicureans, pleasure is understood as the absence of pain and discomfort; therefore excessive desires that cannot be easily satisfied, such as those that require large amounts of money or effort, are eschewed as detrimental to the pursuit of pleasure, since the anxiety and sweat that they cause impinge upon the individual's enjoyment of life. Excessive desires for luxury or profit are furthermore denounced for the reason that they can never be fully satisfied, since there is always more luxury and more profit to be desired; one who takes pleasure in simple things will not succumb to such a spiral of desires for increase, since everything he wants is readily available. In the Odes, a system of values closely approximating these precepts is reflected in the poems that address the theme of otium and negotium, especially in the opposition between the farmer and the merchant, as well as in the poems of the symposiast. Another tenet of Epicurean philosophy that is evidenced in the Odes is that, as Gian Biagio Conte writes, "the [Epicurean] wise man relies on the present alone, which he seeks to capture in its flight, and he acts as if each day were the last"; this is exactly the message of 1.11, which establishes the philosophical creed of the symposiast. These consonances are not accidental, but because the symposiast embodies the spirit of Epicurean philosophy.

45 Ibid. p. 534
46 Conte, Latin Literature: A History, p. 307
Here a disclaimer must be made in regard to the extent of Horace’s Epicureanism in the *Odes*. Although Horace is not a doctrinaire follower of any philosophical school, it is generally conceded, as Wilkinson writes, the poet “found Epicureanism the most congenial of the moral philosophies.” This is not, however, to say that the *Odes* are an Epicurean tract. Instead, the undeniably salient strain of Epicurean thought in the symposiast’s poems is testament to Horace’s use of separate voices, or as Wilkinson calls them, masks in the *Odes*. Horace, however, is hardly a passive imbiber of received wisdom, and no tradition or convention is ever used in the *Odes* in an unadulterated fashion; the symposiast’s Epicureanism has, as we shall see, a peculiarly Horatian slant, especially in regard to his approach to nature.

In Horace’s portrait of the symposiast in 1.1, the second quality of the character that is established after his symposiastic tendencies is that after taking off from work he is inclined to go and relax in a natural, rustic setting, “sometimes with his limbs/ outstretched beneath a green arbutus tree,/ sometimes by a gentle spring of sacred waters” (21–22). In specifying that the symposiast likes to recline by the natural wellspring (*caput*, 22) of sacred waters (*aquae . . . sacrae*, 22), Horace conveys that the scene takes place in the countryside and not in the city of Rome on the banks of the Tiber, and the association of the symposiast with the sacred spring suggests that may be something sacred about his character as well. The most significant element of this portrait, however, is that the setting the symposiast chooses for his repose is, with its shading Arbutus tree and running water, the classic *locus amoenus*, or pleasant locale, of Greek lyric poetry.

47 Wilkinson, p. 27
The *locus amoenus* is a topos that stems from Homer\(^{48}\) and the earliest lyric poetry as a place in a natural, or woodland, setting well suited for secluded pleasures. In a fragment of a poem by Archilochus, the father of Greek lyric, we have the description of the youthful poet making love to a girl in a flowering meadow\(^{49}\); Sappho, in a sensual religious hymn, tries to persuade Aphrodite to visit her by describing the natural surroundings of her shrine:

A cool brook sounds through apple boughs,  
and all's with roses overhung;  
from shimmering leaves a trancelike sleep takes hold.  

Here is a flowery meadow, too,  
where horses graze, and gentle blow  
the breezes . . . \(^{50}\)

As in these examples, the *locus amoenus* is predominantly associated in Greek lyric poetry with love and depicted as an enjoyable place for sexual delight—most likely for the pragmatic reason that it is private and atmospheric. But while the presence of the *locus amoenus* in Greek lyric poetry serves to give Horace the technical license to use the same theme in the *Odes*—which purport to revive the old lyric topoi—the depictions of the *locus* in the Greek tradition tend to be simply places of natural beauty and physical comfort without any moral or symbolic meaning.

In the hands of the Alexandrian poet Theocritus the topos took on a more abstract, ideological significance. The *Idylls*, Theocritus’ collection of pastoral vignettes, established the character of the *locus* as something more than just a

\(^{48}\) His description of Calypso’s grotto is usually considered an *ur locus amoenus*. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 880

\(^{49}\) Fr.196, Ed. and translation D. West

\(^{50}\) Fr. 2, Ed. and translation D. West
comfortable physical space where one could do what one liked—it became the emblem of the pastoral outlook on life. In the *Idylls* Theocritus portrays a group of carefree Arcadian shepherds who lead lives of bucolic contentment in a Golden Age landscape, driving their herds through peaceful hills and reclining, whenever the urge strikes them, in a shady spot to exchange songs about love, pastoral legends, and the duties of the herdsman. The most distinctive characteristic that the Arcadians display in their repose is their freedom. As herdsmen their occupation is a simple one: they follow sheep, goats, and cows through a lush pastureland and watch over them as they eat, sleep, and mate, and, as if observing the herd’s example, they themselves recline on the grass and reflect poetically on their own romances. In effect, they behave as naturally—and therefore, as freely—as the herds. Another indication of the Arcadians’ freedom is in the spontaneous way they are able to decide to rest wherever and whenever they wish, since there is never a pressing concern to keep them from their leisure; these qualities of spontaneity and choice are recurrent motifs of the pastoral *locus amoenus*. The other significant characteristic of the Arcadians’ repose is that their chief reason for choosing a *locus amoenus* is to engage in the composition and recitation of poetry with other herdsmen whose paths they cross in the hills. In this way, poetry, the spontaneity that comes from freedom, and pastoralism all converge in the Arcadians’ enjoyment of their idyllic place of repose, and thus in this recreation the Arcadians reveal their simple values—their contentment is composed of leisure and poetry, not material ambition.51 In the *Odes*, Horace uses the *locus amoenus* much in the same way—as the site of bucolic recreation and the

51 Virgil’s *Eclogues*, as a deliberate imitation of the *Idylls* portrays the pastoral *locus amoenus* in the same fashion.
composition of poetry, as well as a reflection of the values of the person who is enjoying its comfort.

The *locus amoenus* is also, significantly, a topos of Epicurean poetry. Of such a place Lucretius, the famous Epicurean philosopher-poet, writes:

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\begin{align*}
\textit{neque natura ipsa requirit,} \\
\textit{si non aurea sunt iuvenum simulacra per aedes} \\
\textit{lampadas igniferas manibus retinentia dextris,} \\
\textit{lumina nocturnis epulis ut suppeditentur,} \\
\textit{né domus argento fulget auroque renidet} \\
\textit{nec citharae reboant laqueata aurataque templae,} \\
\textit{cum tamen inter se prostrati in gramine molli} \\
\textit{propert aquae rivum sub ramis arboris altae} \\
\textit{non magnis opibus iucunde corpora curant,} \\
\textit{praesertim cum tempestas adridet et anni} \\
\textit{tempora conspergunt viridantis floribus herbas.}
\end{align*}
\]

Nature herself does not require anything else, if there are not golden statues of young men all through the house, holding flaming torches in their right hands that they might furnish light for nocturnal feasts, if the house doesn’t shine with silver and sparkle with gold, if no lyres resound in paneled or gilded shrines, as long as men stretched out together on soft grass next to a stream of water, beneath the branches of a tall tree, delightedly care for their bodies at no great cost, especially when the weather smiles and the time of year strews the verdant grass with flowers. \(^{52}\)

In this passage, Lucretius describes a spot of repose precisely like the one Horace depicts in 1.1—there is a source of running water, a shading tree, green vegetation, and although there is no reference to a spring or any other element to prove that the recumbent Epicures are deep in the countryside, the serenity of the passage, as well as the contrast of the *locus* with the extravagant edifices described

\(^{52}\) De Rerum Natura 2.23-33
before it, suggests that they are\textsuperscript{53}. Just as these elements are described here as a requirement for contentment, they are the \textit{sine qua non} of leisured repose in the \textit{Odes}. This specific, set piece of a locale evokes the same kind of comfort and seclusion as the meadowy \textit{locus} in Greek lyric poetry and same pastoral ease and freedom from care of Theocritus' Arcadians, but in the \textit{De Rerum Nature} the topos is treated with a moral tone absent in the other traditions. In the above passage, Lucretius declares that Nature herself—the personification of Epicurean morality—requires that mankind do nothing more than enjoy the simple pleasures of life in the natural comfort of a \textit{locus amoenus}, so long as they do not value decadent luxury. In this valuation of simple natural enjoyment over lavish, unnatural practices that center on the display of wealth, Lucretius expresses one of the tenets of Epicurean philosophy—that contentment is to be found in the moderate pleasures provided by nature and, explicitly, not in any form of excess. In the \textit{Odes}, Horace uses the \textit{locus amoenus} to represent the same Epicurean values described by Lucretius in \textit{De Rerum Natura} and as a site well suited for the pursuit of moderate pleasures, which Horace epitomizes in his depiction of the outdoor symposium.

There is one other tradition that may be counted among the influences of Horace's use of the \textit{locus amoenus} in the \textit{Odes}. While literature and philosophy each give their own elevated portrayals of this picturesque natural locale, it is interesting to note that the qualities of the poetic \textit{locus amoenus}—vegetation, flowing water, and shade—do not only reflect the taste of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Epicurean poets; they reflect also the general Roman aesthetic of \textit{otium}. Shade, water, and greenery were treated as the staples of repose throughout Italy, and homeowners in Rome and

\textsuperscript{53} Cf. Ibid 5.1379-1416
resort towns like Pompeii who had no immediate access to such natural furnishings recreated them artificially in their homes—every garden or peristyle courtyard in a Roman house either had a fountain or pool, shade, and some growing plantlife or images of it depicted on the walls. This was true not only of privately owned houses but in popular housing projects as well. In Ostia, the bustling port town just outside of Rome, the ruins of several apartment complexes still exhibit the vestiges of interior courtyards where the tenants, who were of a lower class than the owners of private villas, would have been able to enjoy these elemental comforts as well; in a sense, these complexes prefigured Le Corbusier’s post-war apartment projects, which featured similar garden-spaces for communal use and recreation. The significance of these Roman gardens, however, is that they provide evidence of a vernacular aesthetic of leisure, a collective Roman appreciation of the natural elements of the *locus amoenus*. This does not, of course, indicate that all Romans shared Horace’s, Lucretius’, or Theocritus’ conception of the value of natural repose—only that the combination of vegetation, flowing water, and shade signified to the Roman mind *otium*.

Horace’s depiction of the *locus amoenus* in the *Odes* is a reflection of all of these influences, and resonances of their particular motifs of the *locus* can be seen throughout the work. Although it would be an overstatement to say that Horace’s *locus* is the ‘product’ of these traditions, it is evident that the poet derived certain emphases from their depictions and fused them into something that was uniquely his own. The pastoralism and spontaneity of the Arcadian herdsmen’s repose is combined with the Epicurean paradigm of the *locus* as the place of morally
sanctioned pleasure and the Roman idea of *otium* to create a natural precinct of enjoyment that is literally, philosophically, and culturally endorsed. In the poems written in the voice of the symposiast, Horace fuses this idyllic place of satisfaction and repose with the contentment offered by the symposium, creating a philosophical haven from distress—a place of ideal contentment, where all of the pleasures are morally sanctioned and ready at hand. This is both home of the symposiast and the symbol of Horace's poetic philosophy, and in the *Odes* Horace uses the voice of the symposiast to invite his friends to these spiritual symposia, thereby encouraging them to embrace the contentment offered by his synthesis of the *carpe diem* mentality and the *locus amoenus*. On poem in which such an invitation can be seen is 2.11:

*Quid bellicosus Cantaber et Scythes,*
*Hirpine Quincti, cogitet Hadria*
*divisus objecto, remittas*
*quaerere, nec trepides in usum*

*poscentis aevi pauc. Fugit retro*
*levis iuventas et decor, arida*
*pellente lascivos amores*
*canitie facilemque somnum.*

*Non semper idem floribus est honor*
*vernis, neque uno luna rubens niteit*
*vultu. Quid aeternis minorem*
*consiliis animum fatigas?*

*Cur non sub alta vel platano vel hac*
*pinu iacentes sic temere et rosa*
*canos odorati capillos*
*dum licei, Assyriaque nardo*

*potamus uncti? Dissipat Euhius*
*curas edactis. Quis puer oculus*
*restituet ardenti Falerni*
*pocula praetereunte lympha?*
Quis devium scortum eliciet domo
Lyden? Eburna die, age, cum lyra
maturet, in comptum Lacaenae
more comas religata nodum.

What the warlike Cantabrian and Scythian,
distanced by the buffering Hadrian, is planning
you should cease to inquire, Quinctius Hirpinus,
nor should you worry about the needs
of a life that asks for little. Gossamer youth
and beauty flee behind us, as do steamy
love-affairs and easy sleep
when our hair is dry and gray.

The splendor of spring flowers is not always
the same, nor does the blushing moon shine
with a single face. Why weary your little
mind with eternal plans?

Why don’t we just lie down without a care
under the tall plane tree, or beneath this pine,
and drink while we still can, our gray hair scented
with roses and oiled with Assyrian nard?

Bacchus clears away biting cares.
Which boy can quickly dampen
the cups of burning Falernian
in the passing spring water?

Who will lure that coy sexpot Lyde
from her house? Go, tell her to hurry over
with her ivoried lyre, her tresses tied back
in a smart knot of the Spartan style.

This poem, addressed to Quinctius Hirpinus, is a classic Horatian paraenesis
that presents the brevity of life as a compelling reason to abandon cares and enjoy the
pleasures of the symposium—a line of argument that David West unenthusiastically
calls “the usual platitudes.”54 In its familiarity, however, this poem is an

54 David West, Horace: Odes II, p. 74
exceptionally good place to see how Horace uses nature and the locus amoenus in the call to the symposium, and how he portrays the values of the symposiast.

Horace begins 2.11 by gently chiding his friend for concerning himself unduly with the machinations of Rome’s overseas enemies, the Cantabrians and Scythians, who flank the empire on the West and East. Beginning a poem with the mention of foreign threats is a tactic that Horace uses from time to time as a way of introducing the idea of exterior worries which, though they may concern the politician or the businessman dependant on the channels of trade, are irrelevant to the man who lives in the moment and concerns himself only with what’s at hand; the technique usually implies a degree of hyperbole in the imminence of the foreign threat and then quickly telescopes in to the more immediate matter of the addressee’s lack of personal contentment. This is what Horace does here, presenting Quinctius with the Epicurean dictum that the life doesn’t require much (cf. neque natura ipsa requirit, De Rerum Natura, 2.23) and that he shouldn’t worry himself about the needs of his business either, it is implied, for the well-established Horatian reason that wealth and ambitions are unnecessary—and furthermore, as he goes on to say, time is fleeting and the prospect of death ought to put things in the proper perspective. To buttress his claim that life is fleeting, Horace points to nature and says, “The splendor of spring flowers is not always/ the same, nor does the blushing moon shine/ with a single face.” To view nature as an example to be followed implies that there is something essentially true and revelatory about the natural world that goes beyond the simple concordances between the exterior world and the interior world of man suggested by metaphors and similes. It suggests that nature may be perceived as the

55 Cf. C.2.6, 3.6, and 3.25
actual expression of moral truth—an idea that is to be found in Lucretius’ poetry and Epicurean philosophy.

This use of nature as an example to be followed or reacted to is a common element in the symposiast’s paraenesis, and it reveals a great deal about nature’s moral significance in the *Odes*. When the symposiast directs the addressee’s—and the reader’s—attention to a natural phenomenon and puts forward its example as a compelling reason to indulge in a symposium, the emphasis in the natural phenomenon is typically on its changeability. This is the case in 2.11, as well as in odes such as 1.4, 1.9, and 4.7, which focus on the cycling of the seasons; in these poems, the cycles of the natural world suggest the passing of time that inevitably leads to old age and death. The paraenesis in these poems is that one should embrace the *carpe diem* philosophy and enjoy oneself as life dwindles away. This is change portrayed as something one should react to. When Horace uses the changes of nature as examples to be emulated, the idea of change takes on different connotations. In 1.7, Horace tells his friend Plancus: “As the clear South wind often wipes clouds/ from a dark sky, and it does not always teem/ with rain, so should you wisely remember, Plancus, to bring to sadness and the distresses/ of life an end with mellow wine.”

Here change signifies the idea of adaptability—Plancus should imitate the changes he sees in nature and not to persist in a single foul mood at all times. Through these

56 C.1.7.15-19:  
*Albus ut obscuro deterget nubile caelo*
*saepe Notus neque parturit imbris*

*perpetuos, sic tu sapiens finire memento*
*tristitiam vitaeque labores*
*mollis, Plance, mero . . .*
instances of change, Horace presents natural phenomena as the expressions of a reality that encourages the enjoyment of the symposium with its every gesture; the ephemerality of life as suggested by the seasons’ inexorable revolutions can only be properly compensated for by the enjoyment of the moment, i.e. the symposium, and the sky’s clearing away of clouds is an example of how one should clear away worries—to enjoy the symposium. Nature’s wisdom lies in its changes, Horace shows, and its wisdom is one and the same with the symposiast’s. This is the ultimate justification of the symposium, and the incontrovertibility of its logic within the framework of the symposiast’s philosophy is the reason that it is a staple of the rhetoric of the paraenesis.

After the fashion of the Arcadian pastoralists, spontaneity is the key in this symposium. The preparations begin with the mild surprise, adumbrated to slightly by the ruminations on nature, that Horace and Quinctius are outside; this is only revealed by the deictic “hac” in line 13. Horace first fulfills the pastoral ‘formality’ of suggesting alternative shady spots for repose, signifying their humble freedom of choice, and suggests that they put roses in their hair—and roses, for their brevity of life, are additional reminders of mortality at a symposium, encouraging the revelers to enjoy themselves even more while they can\(^{57}\). Then, picking up the pace, Horace calls for a boy to swiftly go and temper some good wine with water from the nearby stream for moderated drinking; the mention of the stream completes, together with the trees and the shade, the requirements for the \textit{locus amoenus}. To cap off the festivities, Horace finally asks another one of the symposiasts to run and fetch Lyde, the obliging lyre player, to bring the last notes of the pastoral symposium together, love

\(^{57}\) Commager, p.244
and poetry. Thus 2.11 in its compression of so many Horatian themes thoroughly expresses the character of the *locus amoenus* in the *Odes*. It is composed of the lyrical element of sex, in the character of Lyde, the pastoral elements of spontaneity and poetry, and the Epicurean elements of the symposium and the proximity to the encouraging example of nature. This type of enjoyment is certainly attractive, and one is eager to follow Horace's example if only for the pleasure it promises; but the underlying theme of the immanence of death and the futility of ambitions—outside of the pursuit of simple personal contentment in the sphere of the *locus amoenus*—adds a philosophical heft to the pleasure that makes it more than merely the expression of unadulterated hedonism. The symposiast, as the inhabitant of the *locus amoenus*, is the voice of this considered pleasure; he represents the contentment that life-affirming *otium* in the province of nature can bring. In the *Odes*, Horace uses this character's contentment as an inducement for his readers and addressees to embrace the lessons of nature and follow the courses prescribed in its phenomena, leading always to the enjoyment of the symposium.

**The Lyric Poet**

*Me doctarum hedera praemia frontium*
dis miscen superis, me gelidum nemus
*Nymphaorumque leves cum Satyris chori*
scernunt populo, si neque tibias
Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia
Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton.

Ivy, the prize of learned brows, mingles me with the gods above, and the cool grove and
light-footed choruses of Nymphs and Satyrs separate me from the populace, if Euterpe does not withhold the pipes, nor Polyhymnia demure to tune the Lesbian lyre.

(29-34)

When Horace created the persona he was to personally inhabit in the Odes, he molded an identity whose poetic auctoritas would be commensurate with the brilliant achievement of his art. He had taken the entire tradition of lyric poetry and made it his own, single-handedly reviving the dead art and claiming it in the name of Rome and his own genius, and thus even before he finished the Odes he knew the dimension of his accomplishment. It is no surprise that Horace chose to portray himself as the favorite of both the Greek Muses and the Italic Camenae, and the protégé of Mercury, inventor of the lyre—these were the divine guarantors of his inspiration and poetic immortality. But the fact that he aligned his poetic persona with the countryside and the woodland deities is testimony to his admiration for nature and the seriousness of his belief in its relevance in the lives of men. In his introductory self-portrait in 1.1, Horace claims that the “cool grove” (gelidum nemus, 30) and the company of Nymphs and Satyrs—genii of the forest and accomplices of the god of wine—are what differentiate him from the ordinary masses. The gelidum nemus functions here as an elite locus amoenus, its coolness evocative of isolation and intelligence, while the Dionysian revelers suggest the enjoyment of a divine symposium of ambrosial wine and love described only in myth; in this way, Horace endows his lyric persona with the same attributes and associations as the symposiast, obliquely enough not to confuse the two characters but clear enough to give himself all of the blessings in
the *Odes*—not to be outdone by one of his own characters. There are, however, some powers and qualities that stem from the natural world that Horace applies to his persona alone. These poems are notable not only for what they reveal about Horace’s association of nature and poetry but also what they reveal about how the poet chose to establish his lyric voice.

One claim Horace makes in the *Odes* is that he was elected from birth by the Muses to become a great poet. He recounts the Muses that demonstrated this election not through drastic omens, but through gentle ministrations carried out in the world of nature. In poem 4.3, a poem addressed to the muse Melpomene, Horace concocts a kind of etiological myth that credits his poetic ability to the influence of nature on him as a child. The poem begins with a priamel:

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Quem tu, Melpomene, semel
nascentem placido lumine videris,
ilium non labor Isthmius
clarabit pugilem, non equus impiger

curŗu ducet Achaico
victorem, neque res bellica Deliis
ornatum fōliis ducem,
quod regnum tumidas contuderit minas,

ostendit Capitolio:
sȩd quae Tibur aquae fertile praefluunt
et spissae nemorum comae
fingent Aeolio carmine nobilem.
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He whose birth you once looked at with a tender eye, Melpomene, no Isthmian labor will make famous as a pugilist, no hard-working steed will lead to victory in a Greek chariot, and no war-deeds will display as a leader on the Capitoline bedecked with Delian laurel
because he crushed the tumid threats of kings:

but those waters that stream through fertile
Tivoli and the dense foliage of groves
will fashion him a poet
famous for Aeolian song.

(1-12)

Although Horace employs some discretion in these lines by describing his poetic celebrity (nobilem, 12) in the third person, as if he were proposing a general truth and not speaking of a specific poet, and by setting the natural scene in Tivoli and not Venusia, as Fraenkel says the truth is that; "only one man can be meant [by nobilem], Horace." It is not insignificant that 4.3, like 1.1, contains a priamel that runs through a sequence of aspirants to glory to finally end on Horace, a lyric poet in the lap of nature; a further resonance between the two poems is present in the phrase (spissae nemorum comae, 11)—nemorum recalls the nemus of 1.1, while the dense foliage would provide the grove with cooling shade. This deliberate echo reestablishes in the second installment of his lyric collection the grounding of his poetic voice in the countryside. This poem furthermore suggests a very Wordsworthian idea—the world of nature inspired Horace’s poetry, albeit with the breath of Melpomene, and made him the poet, and the man, that he was.

Another poem that contains the theme of nature’s influence on the poet’s childhood is 3.4. In this poem, also addressed to a Muse, Calliope, Horace describes a miraculous incident that occurred when he was an infant:

Me fabulosae Vulture in Apulo
matricis extra limina Puliae
ludo fatigatumque somno
fronde nova puerrum palumbes

58 Fraenkel, p. 408
textere, mirum quod foret omnibus,
quicumque celsae nidum Acherontiae
saltusque Bantinos et arvum
pingue tenent humilis Forenti,
ut tuto ab atriis corpore viperis
dormirem et ursis, ut premerer sacra
lauroque collataque myrto,
non sine dis animosus infans.

Once as a boy on Mt. Vulture in Apulia
I was exhausted by play and overcome with sleep
away from the threshold of my nurse, Pullia,
and the famous doves covered me with fresh
leaves, which would be a miracle
to all those whom the nest of high
Acherontia and the glade of Bantia
and the fat fields of low-lying Forentine hold

that I had slept wholly safe from black
vipers and bears, that I was piled with
collected myrtle and sacred laurel,
an infant inspired by the gods.

Unlike 4.3, where Horace knowingly misplaced his childhood in Tivoli, here the
poet explicitly locates the scene in his birthplace of Apulia, and to emphasize the
humble and rural nature of his hometown he moreover gives “the names of three
townlets in the district of Venusia, the existence of which was presumably
unknown to anyone who had not lived in that far-off part of Italy.” The effect of
this recondite information is to lend a distinctly provincial quality to the setting of
the poem, portraying Venusia as a backwater far from the importance of Rome. It
is here in this backwater, however, that Horace writes he was miraculously
protected from danger as a child and selected by the muses, through the medium

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39 Fraenkel, p. 274
of nature, to become a great poet—doves (*palumbes*, 12), the sacred birds of Venus, garland him with laurel and myrtle (*lauroque collocaque myrto*, 19), the symbols, respectively, of Apollo and high poetry and Venus and love poetry.\(^6^0\)

This type of story about miracles occurring to extraordinary men in their childhood is common in the biographies of the great Greek lyricists\(^6^1\) as well as of other great figures—Suetonius tells a story about the young Octavian miraculously demonstrating his future greatness by telling some frogs croaking outside his grandfather’s villa to be quiet, thereby silencing them forever.\(^6^2\) In making this comparison between himself and the canonical lyric poets Horace boldly asserts his own status as a great lyric bard, but the juxtaposition of this claim with the description of his humble beginnings out in the countryside adjusts this assertion slightly. Not only is Horace a great lyric bard, but he is a great lyric bard who was elected by the Muses out in the unknown farmlands (*arvum*, 15) of Italy. This is not, however, simply a further boast, that he raised himself out of obscurity to become a renowned poet; Horace is also proud of his agrarian roots. This is implied by the fond detail of his supposed childhood memory—the little Horace all tuckered out from playing in the woods is a charming picture—and also by the gentle honorifics that the poet bestows on the surrounding towns so familiar to him (e.g., “the nest of high Acherontia,” *celiae nidum Acherontiae*, 14). In this poem, Horace’s proud association of his exalted poetic status with his rustic origins gives an indication of his earnestness in praising the countryside in the *Odes.*

\(^6^0\) Garrison, *Horace*, p. 299
\(^6^1\) Fraenkel, p. 275
\(^6^2\) Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 94
Horace frequently addresses the theme of the poet’s special protection. In 2.7, Horace recounts how in the battle of Phillipi he was saved when “swift Mercury bore me in a thick mist, terrified, through the enemy”\(^63\); the implication of this account is that Mercury, the inventor of the lyre and the god of tricks and complexity, protected him because he was a poet fated to write extraordinary lyric. It is significant, however, that in the *Odes* Horace’s most devoted tutelary and patron saint among the gods is not Mercury or Apollo, the gods most closely associated with poetry, but Faunus, god of the Italian woodland. This is not to say that Faunus is unconnected with poetry; as Steele Commager writes, “Horace identifies Faunus, Latin god of the countryside, with the Arcadian Pan, son of Mercury, follower of Dionysus, and inventor of the pipe.”\(^64\) In this identification, Faunus is closely associated with the inspiration and composition of poetry; but his association with Pan and Dionysus, the hillside deities, specifies that the poetry in Faunus’ purview is by nature rustic, and pastoral. With the choice of Faunus as his personal protector, Horace suggests that it is not only his poetry that makes him worthy of preservation in the eyes of the gods, but also his reverence for the countryside and its values.

*Velox amoenum saepe Lucretilem
mutat Lycaeo Faunus et igneam
defendit austatem capellis
usque meis pluviosque ventos.*

_Impune tutum per nemus arbutus
quaerunt latentes et thyma deviae
olentis uxorres mariti,
nec viridis metuant colubras_

\(^63\) C.2.7.13-14: Sed me per hostis Mercurius celer/ densa poventem susulit aere
\(^64\) Commager, p. 348
nec Martialis haediliae lupos,
utcumque dulci, Tyndari, fistula
valles et Usticae cubantis
levia personueru saxa.

Di me tuentur, dis pietas mea
et Musa cordi est; hinc tibi copia
manabit ad plenum benigno
ruris honorum opulenta cornu.

Hic in reducta valle Caniculae
vitabis aestus, et fide Teia
dices laborantis in uno
Penelopen vitreamque Circen;

hic innocentis pocula Lesbii
duces sub umbra, nec Semeleius
cum Marte confundet Thyoneus
proelia, nec metues protervum

suspecta Cyrum, ne male dispari
incontinentis iniciae manus
et scindat haerentem coronam
crinibus immeritamque vestem.

Swift Faunus often exchanges
Lycaeus for charming Lucretilis
and always wards off fiery heat
from my goats, and the rainy winds.

The wandering wives of pungent husbands
safely search though the protected
woods for hidden arbutus and thyme,
and the kids fear neither green snakes

nor Martial wolves whenever
the valleys and the smooth rocks
of recumbent Ustica resound,
Tyndaris, with the sweet pipe.

The gods protect me; my piety and my
Muse are dear to the gods. Here for you
the rich abundance of the field's pride will
flow to the brim from the bounteous horn.
Here in this cloistered valley you will avoid the heat of the Dogstar, and on a Tean string you will tell of Penelope and glossy Circe struggling over the same man; here in the shade you will sip cups of harmless Lesbian, and neither Semelean Bacchus will mix with Mars, causing fights, nor will you fear the suspicions of brash Cyrus, nor will he thrust an intemperate hand at you, ill-matched to your resistance, and tear the garland fixed in your hair and your undeserving dress.

In this poem, Horace places himself in a dream-like version of his Sabine farm, where it is as if the Golden Age continues unabated, only with Faunus at the helm instead of Saturn. As in the Golden Age, Horace’s flocks roam freely through the woods, their absolute safety conveyed by the tautological *junctura* of *impune tutum* (5); the bounty of the land is overflowing, as one can tell from lines 14-16 where seven of the eleven words in the clause indicate the idea of plenty. The detail that Faunus often exchanges Lycaeus, a mountain in Arcadia, for lovely Lucretilis above Horace’s farm (1-2) lends a pastoral note to the poem, while *amoenum* (1) and *reducta valle* (17) both suggest the presence of the *locus amoenus* motif. The penultimate stanza’s promise of Lesbian wine (*pocula Lesbii*, 21) enjoyed in the shade (*sub umbra*, 22) guarantees the pleasures of an outdoor symposium, and Tyndaris’ hoped-for acceptance of this poem’s invitation will complete the scene with the same sympotic qualities of love and music sought from Lyde in 2.11. What has Horace done to earn this rich medley of the farmer’s and the symposiast’s pleasures? “My piety and my muse are dear to the

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"gods" (dis pietas mea/ et Musa cordi est, 13-14) is his explanation. Since Faunus is the god in this poem who protects Horace's herds and ensures the peace of his farm, the pietas, though certainly for the dis in general, seems to specifically apply to the woodland god; once again, as in 4.3 and 3.4, we see that the poet's blessings come from a conjunction of the muses and the natural world. This poem is the consummate expression of Horace's wedding of nature and poetry in the Odes. The poet's protection and inspiration come from both the Muses and the world of nature—which in fact functions, in its close association with the poets powers, as a second Muse itself.

As the voice of the collection, the lyric poet encompasses the most exalted elements of the Odes; he enjoys the pleasance of the farm without the toil and poverty of the farmer, and the sympotic leisure of the symposiast without even the consideration of the business day. The lyric poet's absence from the city is absolute; his character is free even from association with the city.

Appendix: Greek Lyric Poetry

The tradition of Greek lyric poetry that Horace so lovingly revived in his Odes had been nearly forgotten, or regarded as obsolete, by the poets of the first century BC. With the exception of Catullus, whose status as a lyric poet is still contested, the last serious effort to write lyric poetry was made in Alexandria in the third century BC by Callimachus; after him, the dominant mode of poetry became the epic. Horace, however, in a mood half conservationist, half visionary, embraced the
neglected lyric tradition and, as W.R. Johnson writes, set out to “re-create the spirit of Greek lyric in its entirety.” This was quite a daunting feat to accomplish.

Lyric poetry was held in antiquity to be one of the three cardinal poetic genres, together with epic and narrative poetry, and from the time of Homer to the Hellenistic period it was the predominant form of poetic production in Greece. Within the lyric genre there are three main subdivisions: there is iambic and elegiac poetry, which were both chanted, and melic poetry, which was traditionally sung to musical accompaniment. Iambic poetry has a sharp, syncopated rhythm especially suited to invective and satire, and though it was the favored style of the ur-lyricist Archilochus it is rare among the other Greek poets. Elegiac poetry is the form of lyric most similar to epic in style, since it is composed of alternating lines of dactylic hexameter—the meter employed by Homer and Hesiod—and dactylic pentameter; its earliest use was in the composition of war poetry. Melic poetry, however, was the most popular form of lyric among the Greek poets, and since the lyre was a frequent manner of accompaniment, it is the style that earned “lyric” poetry its name.

Horace, in his reproduction of Greek lyric, focused on seven lyric poets from the Archaic age whose reanimated voices, meters, and themes would together suffice his Odes with the “spirit” of the lyric tradition. Though all of these poets chose the topics of their verse from a relatively limited range of subject matter—love, wine, war, and the celebration of heroes, politicians, and divinities—each did so in a remarkably individual style, so much so that a modern reader can hear the personal voices of the poets even in the sorry, fragmentary collections of lyric poetry we have

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65 Johnson, The Idea of Lyric, p. 123
66 de Romilly, A Short History of Greek Literature, p. 29-30
today. These poets were Archilochus, Alcman, Sappho, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Simonides, and Pindar.

Although there are some lyrical passages in the Iliad—most notably Achilles’s lament at the death of Patroklos, the elegiac dirges at Hector’s funeral, and Hellen’s sôlliloquies—\(^{67}\) it has been acknowledged since antiquity that the birth of lyric poetry occurred on the island of Paros in the seventh century BC, one hundred years after Homer, in the forceful iambics of Archilochus. Famous for his deadly invective, Archilochus wrote screeds against his enemies and ex-lovers that scandalized his contemporaries, but he also wrote humanely about war—he created the lyric trope of the “abandoned shield,” where a soldier saves his life by leaving his shield and a little of his honor behind on the field of battle—and about love and the symposium. More pious than Archilochus, Alcman wrote choral songs that praised the gods and admonished the audience to be humble and moderate in view of their mortality, as well as some tender poems about his love life and his aging which echo the moral tone of the religious hymns. Sappho wrote beautiful and affecting love poetry, in which she is on easy terms with Aphrodite and can address her as an old friend, and almost every poem is a declaration of romantic love; her overall demeanor is that of a poet who devotes her entire will to the pursuit of love and its enjoyment. Alcaeus, who hailed from Mytilene in Lesbos, the same city as Sappho, sung about the political struggles of his day, in which he was personally embroiled as an unpopular candidate, and also composed copious drinking song which position the poet as the symposiarch. Anacreon, who shares Sappho’s easygoing unconcern for politics and
the unpleasant aspects of life, wrote poetry that seems to all take place either at a symposium or in bedroom, yet there is a constant moral strain that resembles Epicureanism in its celebration of simple pleasures. Simonides wrote choral poems in celebration of Olympic victors and politicians, together with hymns and dirges; a recurrent theme of his is the brevity of life and the universality of death, for example: "Man’s strength is but little, and futile his concerns; his lifespan short, filled with trouble on trouble; and over it death, inescapable, uniform, looms; to be dispensed in equal shares/ to high and low alike.” 68 Simonides also espoused the influential wisdom: “As you are mortal, don’t ever affirm what tomorrow will bring.” 69 Pindar, the last of the great Greek lyricists from the archaic period, was an panegyrist who wrote encomia for Heiron, a tyrant of Syracuse, and for the victorious athletes of the Greek games; he was a vatic poet in the lineage of Homer and Hesiod in that in his poetry he summoned, rather than invoked, the gods and muses, and the complexity of his poems suggests the infinite gaze of a prophet.

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68 Fragment 520, M. L. West *Greek Lyric Poetry*, p. 162
69 Fragment 521, ibid, p. 162


