

HORACE, *EPISTLES*, 1. 16. 35 ff.

'pone, meum est' inquit: pono tristisque recedo.
idem si clamet furem, neget esse pudicum,
contendat laqueo collum pressisse patrum,
mordeat opprobriis falsis mutemque colores?
falsus honor iuvat et mendax infamia terret
quem nisi mendosum et medicandum?

IN this noblest of Epistles Horace has been warning Quinctius to trust his own judgement about his happiness—is he *sapiens bonusque*? (20).¹ The plaudits of the people are fickle and can be withdrawn overnight. Only a man who is flawed and in need of treatment is delighted by false honour or upset by untrue defamation: the philosophic man is impervious to both. Horace, prompted by the words 'pone, meum est',² illustrates the idea of defamation by reference to a very ancient and traditional form of Italian popular justice—*flagitatio* or defamatory dunning.³ The three charges made in the Horatian passage—thieving, homosexuality, and unfilial behaviour—also appear in the classic Plautine catalogue of *flagitatio* at *Pseud.* 360 ff., where the pimp Ballio is abused: 'fur' (365), 'impudice' (360), 'parricida' (362).⁴

Horace's style is here highly wrought, with *variatio* in *clamet . . . neget . . . contendat*, the alliteration *contendat . . . collum, pressisse patrum* (the latter in a place in the line familiar from the high style of epic and tragedy), the simple *pressisse* for *compressisse*, and indeed the whole of 37, a grandiose circumlocution for 'parricidam me dicat'. This gives a mock-elevated style of a kind well known in Lucilius and Horace's *Satires* to the *flagitatio*, which knew its own special eloquence.⁵

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¹ *Ep.* 1. Cf. 4. 5, 7. 22.

² I owe this point to Professor Niall Rudd.

³ Cf. H. Usener, *Rh. Mus.* lvi (1901), 1 ff. = *Kl. Schriften* iv. 356 ff., who does not include the present passage in his funda-

mental treatment of the subject.

⁴ Cf. also 367, 'verberavisti patrem atque matrem', to which Ballio unashamedly replies, 'atque occidi quoque'.

⁵ Cf. E. Fraenkel, *J.R.S.* li (1961), 48 ff.