

# Latin

## Component 2: Literature (30%)

Wednesday 3rd May 2023

## LO: to read and understand the notes to Horace's second poem

### 'The Changing Face of the Countryside'

- How many stanzas/verses?
- Read through the translation
- What is the poem about? What are the main ideas explored?

*This poem is split into 2 complex sentences. The first 10 lines (to ictus) depict contemporary ostentation in contrast to the second 10 lines which depict the simple way of life of Rome's great men of the past.*

## Horace: Odes 2.15 – *The changing face of the countryside*

*Horace contrasts the decadence of Rome's aristocrats to the old simple way of life*

**iam:** 'Before long' a time marker, added to by the word *tum* repeated later in the poem (lines 5 and 9). The adverb draws attention to the hyperbole of the first section, warning of future decadence.

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moles relinquent, undique latius

extenta visentur Lucrino

stagna lacu platanusque caelebs

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**aratro:** ploughing was to be encouraged as traditional hard work providing food although it was more economical to import grain in bulk from Africa.

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**regiae:** translated as 'aristocratic' in describing the owners of the mansions. It can also be translated as 'princely' and it associates the wealthy landowners with kings. The Romans had been keen to avoid kings after the beginning of the Republic, despite Augustus' consolidation of power as a sole ruler by the time of the poem. This therefore sets a derogatory tone, highlighting the power and arrogance of the wealthy, despite the fact most became wealthy from business (comparison could be made with modern day leaders).

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Lines 1-2 describe the decline in the number of small holdings in Italy. There could be a number of reasons for this: the death of the landowners and destruction of land in the recent civil war, the increasing number of affluent Romans with large estates and the decrease in profitability of small holdings due to an increase in goods imported from Rome's provinces.

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**undique latius extenta:** three words to emphasise the scale of the spread of such pools on what was previously farmland.

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**visentur:** as with 'relinquent' in the previous line, the future tense suggests a dire prophecy or warning.

**Lucrino:** a lake close to Baiae. Horace has perhaps chosen it due to it being a well-known large lake and because Baiae was known for its decadent *villae*. *Lucrino* and *lacu* in the next line are ablatives of comparison after *latius*. When Horace wrote this poem, the lake had recently been joined to Lake Avernus to form the naval harbour 'portus Iulius', built by Agrippa, making its extent even more spectacular (Nisbet and Hubbard. 1978, p245).

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**stagna:** paired with *extenta* 'the extended pools'. Horace has deliberately used *stagna* literally 'standing water', derived from *stare* (Nisbet and Hubbard, 1978, p. 245), to imply stagnation. It is important to note that these 'pools' are used for raising fish for the rich man's table. Horace may be making a variety of points with his choice of this word. Creating such pools to farm fish could be considered to be interfering with the order of nature (emphasised by the *stagna* interrupting the natural pairing of *Lucurino* with *lacu*). Also, the excessive size of these pools which are growing ever bigger reflects the excessively extravagant lifestyles of the wealthy.

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**platanusque caelebs**: the plane tree was an ornamental tree imported from Greece and Asia, attested to be placed in private gardens in numerous works of Latin literature (Cicero *De Oratores* 1.28, Seneca *Epistles* 12.2, Pliny the Younger *Epistles* 5.6.20). It is *caelebs* 'solitary' because, unlike elms (*ulmos*), it could not be used to support vines. *Caelebs* (which can also be translated as unmarried) stands in contrast to the *fertilibus* in line 8. In Catullus 62.54 the process of supporting vines is called 'marrying' the tree to the vine. After Augustus' moral reforms encouraging childbirth, *caelebs* would be particularly evocative of uselessness and self-indulgence.

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**evincet:** another future tense verb. Placed in the unusual position at the beginning of a line and before the end of the clause. Showing the subversion of the natural order by the wiping out of elms.

evincet ulmos; tum violaria et  
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spargent olivetis odorem

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Lines 1-5 Horace has used a *tricolon* (losing land for farming, large pools for fishing and the spread of plane trees) to show the encroachment of wealth on the old simple way of life before *tum* in line 5.

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**tum:** marks the start of a new thought as Horace moves onto *horti*. Horace has used the language of prophecies – a prediction followed by things that will naturally occur should it come true. Here, Horace warns of the loss of viticulture and olive growing caused by creating gardens for the pleasure from the aroma and shade from trees.

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**violaria:** along with *myrtus* in line 6. Both violets and myrtles were used to make garlands, often worn at parties. Horace may be hoping to link them to the luxury of having time to party, rather than working the land.

**et....et:** the repetition of *et* here (*polysyndeton*) emphasises the numerous smells from the flowers assaulting the nostrils.

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**copia narium:** literally 'wealth of the nostrils' with narium being the possessive genitive as if the nostrils owned the abundance. A very striking way to emphasise the aroma of smells being taken in. Horace is highlighting the smells to make the point that they are being grown for their scent, rather than as crops.

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**spargent:** another future tense verb. It can be used to describe the sowing (or sprinkling) of seed but here it is the smells rather than the seed which is scattered.

**olivetis:** paired with *fertilibus* in line 8. An ablative of place indicating the smells take the place of olives (growing olives would have been a more productive use of the land).

**priori:** an important word contrasting the warning of the future with the traditional, productive work of the former master.

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**tum:** repetition from line 5 leads the reader on through the sequence of changes that indicate decline from productive farming to wasteful decadence.

**spissa ramis laurea:** *ramis* is an ablative explaining why the tree is thick 'the laurel tree thick with branches.' Horace may be criticising the practice of cutting back to promote new growth to give denser shade. It is ironic that that a tree whose branches symbolised victory in athletic competition is now used to provide shade for idle Romans.

tum spissa ramis laurea fervidos

excludet ictus. non ita Romuli

praescriptum et intonsi Catonis

auspiciis veterumque norma.

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**ictus:** paired with *fervidos*, literally 'burning darts', here used to indicate the rays of the sun (*metonymy*).

**non ita:** this emphatic phrase moves us to the idyllic ways of the past. Note the verbs now change to the past tense.

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**Romuli:** Romulus symbolises Rome at its mythical foundation in 753 BC. Horace here claims that Rome was founded on traditional values of farming the land. Romans believed that Romulus had lived in a single-roomed hut, preserved on the Palatine hill. Horace may also be bringing to mind and obliquely praising Augustus who himself lived on the Palatine Hill, near this hut.

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**intonsi Catonis:** Barbers had not been introduced to Rome until 300 BC. This is echoing the idea that it is extravagant to spend time clipping back trees in line 9, here it is extravagant to cut hair. Horace is invoking the stern older Cato when he had been *ensor*. Cato was almost a synonym for the ideas of returning to old Roman virtue and he had himself boasted that he had a hard upbringing on the Sabine hills.

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**auspiciis:** the choice of the word '*auspicium*' for instruction evokes an almost religious tone. Leaders of expeditions, such as war campaigns, were expected to take the auspices – that is interpret signs from the gods. In this way, it also implies a sense of the good leadership of past generations.

**norma:** literally means a set square, it adds a sense of precision and order, echoed also in line 14 *decempedis*.

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**privatus:** this word is an emphatic addition as '*census*' already implies private wealth.

**illis:** refers back to the '*veteres*' (past generations) mentioned in line 12.

The final two stanzas (lines 13 to 20) highlight how old rural ideals privilege the state over the individual and make a sustained contrast between private and public. Lines 13-14 compare *privatus* with *commune* (both placed in prominent positions at the beginning of the line).

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**decempedis:** literally ten feet to indicate a ten-foot ruler used by surveyors and architects. Terms of measurement (also line 12 *norma*) give the second half of the poem an ordered and precise feeling. It also makes the private colonnades feel excessively large.

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**privatis:** *anaphora* (repetition) of *privatus*. Continuing the contrast of public vs private.

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**opacam:** paired with *Arcton* (line 16) 'the shady Northern light'. *Arctos* is the constellation of Ursa Major so the wind blowing from there would be the North Wind and therefore cold.

It is not entirely obvious what Horace means in lines 14-16. On the surface, it appears that he is criticising privately built colonnades for not providing shade. It is more likely that he is pointing out that in the past colonnades were built using public funds and provided shade for the public good.

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**nec:** this is the third negative (*non* line 10 and *nulla* line 14) word used since the change to discussing the traditional past. It gives these lines a reprimanding tone.

nec fortuitum spernere caespitem  
leges sinebant, oppida publico  
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**fortuitum:** something you might stumble upon and is therefore re-used. This is in contrast to *novo* (the new material) in line 20.

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**caespitem:** both grass and a building material which could be used to build walls but more commonly as a roofing material. There were many houses in country districts with this type of roof. It may also allude to the house of Romulus mentioned above which would have been built in this fashion.

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**leges sinebant:** this is hyperbole. The law did not prevent this, but it did restrict the use of expensive materials.

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**publico:** paired with *sumptu*. Horace believes it is more important to use money for public funds to be spent on public building projects, rather than on private accumulation of wealth and property.

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**novo decorare saxo:** reusing old materials had been normal Roman practice so having new stone would have been considered extravagant. In the Roman past, the law had restricted the use of marble to only temples. The Romans believed spending money on temples would help to keep the gods on Rome's side. Augustus is keen to demonstrate this in his *Res Gestae*, focusing on his building projects, especially of temples.

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The contrast of the past and contemporary Rome are also emphasised by the verb *decorare*. In the past, newly cut stone was considered decoration, an additional ornament, whereas in Horace's day many *villae* were faced with this. Horace may also be hinting at Augustus' famous quote 'I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.'

## **Horace: Odes 2.15 – The changing face of the countryside**

4 marks each

*Horace contrasts the decadence of Rome's aristocrats to the old simple way of life*

**2 examples from the Latin  
(then translate each phrase)  
and explain each of your  
points in relation to answering  
the question**

### **Questions on Content and Style**

1. (lines 1-5) How does Horace show his disapproval at the use of land by the wealthy?
2. (lines 5-10) How does Horace suggest the uselessness of the flowers growing in gardens?
3. (lines 1-10) How does Horace effectively warn his readers of an unproductive future?
4. (line 1-10) Is Horace criticising leisure time? Use examples from the text to explain your point of view.
5. (lines 10-12) How does Horace show his wish that Romans return to the ways of the past?
6. (lines 13-20) How does Horace's style and content show what he considers the Romans in his day should be spending money on?
7. (lines 10-20) What impression does Horace give of life in Rome's past? Do you think that Horace would persuade Romans to go back to this way of life?

# Discussion

*This poem is split into 2 complex sentences. The first 10 lines (to ictus) depict contemporary ostentation in contrast to the second 10 lines which depict the simple way of life of Rome's great men of the past.*

It is notoriously difficult to pin down what Horace actually thinks. Is Horace's tone straightforward here? Does he really believe that private wealth has gone too far, that too much time is spent on leisure and that Romans should return their focus to their duty to the state? Are there any parts of his poem that appear exaggerated and perhaps disingenuous?

## Questions on the whole passage

1. What attitudes does Horace have about how Romans should use their land, wealth and time? How does this fit with the other sources you have studied?
2. What can we learn from this poem about how Romans contemporary to Horace used their land, wealth and time? Is Horace describing a problem with all of Roman society or just a part of it?
3. Considering other texts in the specification, do you think Horace's readers would agree with what he has written in this poem?

**Homework: finish the questions (all)**

**Due Wednesday 10th May (a week on Wednesday)**