

Friends by Force: Horace, the Epistolary Genre, and Patron-Client Relationships in *Epistle 1.7*

In *Epistle 1.7*, Horace takes advantage of the informal and friendly tone associated with the epistolary genre to create a work of art that manages simultaneously to emphasize Horace's personal friendship with Maecenas and Augustus and to comment ironically on the mandatory nature of this friendship. Quietly but clearly making several connections between the auctioneer Volteius Mena and both Horace and Horace's father, the poem suggests that the relationship between Mena and the lawyer Philippus parallels the relationship between Horace and Maecenas or Horace and Augustus. Just as Mena finds himself compelled to accept the hospitality and help of his patron Philippus, Horace has little choice but to accept the gifts of Augustus and his confederates, who under the new government act effectively as patrons to the entire Roman world. Horace's fighting on the side of Brutus and the conspirators amounts to his "missing the *salutatio*," just as Mena does in the verse epistle. Thus, like Mena, Horace is compelled to accept whatever treatment his patron wishes to give him. Moreover, Augustus' position as *princeps* places him in such a position of arbitrary control not just over Horace, but over the entire Roman world. Thus, Horace makes clear through the story of Mena the ironically autocratic tendencies lurking just beneath the Augustan regime's veneer of "*magnanimitas*" while at the same time celebrating his friendship with key members of this regime. How does Horace accomplish this feat without risking punishment? Ironically, the regime's *magnanimitas* on some level sustains the criticism of itself, since support of free artistic expression speaks well for a patron or regime. Furthermore, Horace takes advantage of the epistolary genre's associations with friendship to appeal directly to Maecenas as a personal friend. Therefore, this genre is particularly well-suited for Horace to make such a commentary on Augustus' regime without risking his message being taken the wrong way. In this situation, it is the use of the epistolary genre that allows Horace to

find, as he so often does, a middle ground between two extremes: on the one hand, his personal friendship with Maecenas and Augustus and his gratitude for their kindness and their gifts to him, and on the other hand the full knowledge that these are gifts he has little choice but to accept.