

Philomathes

Friendship in Horace's *Satires*

Friendship receives considerable attention in Horace's *Satires*, with forms of *amicus* and *amicitia* appearing thirty-two times in Book 1 and twelve times in Book 2. Indeed, one of the most famous phrases about friendship to come out of ancient Rome is from the *Satires*, though it is rarely discussed in its satirical context: "there is nothing I would compare to a delightful friend as long as I am sane" (*Sat.* 1.5.44).¹ As this quote suggests, Roman culture valued friendship highly; Romans tended to exalt friendship in the same way that modern Western culture reveres romantic spousal relationships, wherein friends were two halves of the same soul (*alter ego*).² For example, Horace himself echoes this sentiment in the *Odes*, where he famously refers to Vergil as "half of my soul" (*animae dimidium meae*, *Odes* 1.3.8) as he wishes Vergil a safe journey to Greece.³ As one of the most important relationships in Roman society, Friendship gives the term *amicitia* more weight in Latin texts than modern readers might imagine. For this reason, the concept of *amicitia* in any Roman literature offers a crucial gateway to understanding the Roman inner life.

Moreover, the scholarly value of friendship in Horace's *Satires* is doubled by its clear connections to Epicureanism,

¹ Horace, *Satires* 1.5.44: *nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico*. Horace, *Satires*, ed. Emily Gowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46. All English translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² Craig A. Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Ebook, 15-17.

³ John Scott Campbell, "Animae Dimidium Meae: Horace's Tribute to Vergil," *Classical Journal* 82, no. 4 (April-May 1987), 314-318, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3298001>.

Philomathes

Horace's evidently preferred ethical philosophy. Epicureans, who above all sought to free themselves from worry (*curae*) and thus achieve contentment (*ataraxia*), emphasized the pursuit of pleasure, giving them an undeserved reputation for extreme "materialism" and hedonism.⁴ Yet, in contrast to this supposed focus on self-gratification, friendship was central to Epicurean philosophy, despite the relationship requiring a degree of self-sacrifice.⁵ In particular, Epicureans saw close and sincere friendships as a means of reaching "tranquility," such that friends offered each other mutual security in the event of adversity.⁶ Many of Horace's discussions of *amicitia* are framed in Epicurean philosophy, but the meaning of this trend is far from clear, and scholarship is divided on the topic. On one hand, Sergio Yona contends that Epicurean philosophy is a major feature of the *Satires*, as "Horace portrays [his] poetic persona as consistently and competently engaged with Epicurean ethics throughout the entire collection."⁷ On the other, scholars such as Roland Mayer characterize Horace's espousal of Epicureanism as more tentative, for "his heart belonged wholly and forever to the Muse" rather than any one philosophy.⁸ Overall, the *Satires* better supports the latter interpretation, for Horace's treatment of friendship is not consistently Epicurean.

⁴ James Warren, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

⁵ William Turpin, "The Epicurean Parasite: Horace, 'Satires,' 1.1-3," *Ramus* 27, no. 2 (1998): 130, DOI: 10.1017/S0048671X00001867.

⁶ Eric Brown, "Politics and Society," in *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, ed. Warren, 182-186.

⁷ Sergio Yona, *Epicurean Ethics in Horace: The Psychology of Satire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2-3.

⁸ Roland Mayer, "Sleeping with the Enemy: Satire and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, ed. Kirk Freudenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153.

Philomathes

Rather, Horace satirizes both friendship and Epicureanism in general with exaggerated and pithy philosophical phrases, as he capitalizes on the Roman idealization of friendship to highlight the sense of discontentment that pervades the *Satires*. Even as the *Satires* expresses a degree of faith in Epicurean philosophy, a motif of doubt in that philosophy ultimately prevails. As Kirk Freudenburg summarizes, the *Satires* illustrates Horace seeking “the Epicurean life that ... he talks about, but cannot seem to live.”⁹ Published during times of great political upheaval and transition from republic to empire (Book 1 in 36 or 35 BCE, Book 2 in 30 BCE), Horace’s discussions of *amicitia* reflect a theme of uncertainty above all, for the *Satires* is inextricably tied to its turbulent contemporary political context, as I. M. Le M. DuQuesnay has argued.¹⁰ In particular, when *Satires* 1 was most likely written, between 38 and 36 BCE, Rome struggled with the continued resistance of Sextus Pompeius (the son of Pompeius Magnus) to Octavian’s new rule; as DuQuesnay succinctly states, “For a second time in two decades Rome had witnessed a power struggle between a Caesar and a Pompeius.”¹¹ In light of this seemingly perpetual conflict, “the fears and anxieties of those years are only too imaginable,” and there is no doubt that those anxieties are represented in the *Satires*.¹²

⁹ Horace, *Satires*, Book II, ed. Kirk Freudenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 8.

¹⁰ I. M. Le M DuQuesnay, “Horace and Maecenas: The Propaganda Value of *Sermones* I,” in *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Tony Woodman and David West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 19.

¹¹ DuQuesnay, “Horace and Maecenas,” 21.

¹² DuQuesnay, “Horace and Maecenas,” 21.

Philomathes

Mentions of *amici* and *amicitia* start in Book 1 as superficially Epicurean appraisals of friendship and turn bitter in Book 2, where friendship is given a much more mocking treatment, arguably reflecting Horace's disappointment and growing cynicism with Rome in the increasingly rigid atmosphere of Augustus' rule by the time of the publication of Book 2 in 30 BCE. This growing dissatisfaction with friendship from Book 1 to Book 2 is also reflected in drastically fewer mentions of friendship words in Book 2 (12 instances) compared to Book 1 (32 instances). Horace invariably uses the term *amicus* to describe friends, with the occasional *comes* referring to companion relationships on a lower rung of importance and commitment.¹³ For example, Horace's travel partner in *Sat.* 1.5, Heliodorus, is a *comes* (*Sat.* 1.5.2, a line cited in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* definition of *comes*, where it refers to a companion), whereas in the same poem Virgil is an *amicus* (*Sat.* 1.5.40-44), indicating a closer friendship than mere partnership in the context of travel.¹⁴ These usages align with their common associations as Craig Williams describes them in *Reading Roman Friendship*, with *amicus* connoting "underlying affection" and *comes* connoting "companionship and shared travels."¹⁵ Other friendship words, such as *familiaris*, *sodalis*, and *necessarius*, do not appear in the *Satires*, with the exception of *sodalis*, which appears twice in Book 2. As such, explicit references to *amicitia* and *amici* are the focus of this analysis, *amicitia* referring to "the

¹³ These usages match the primary definitions of *amicus* and *comes* in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (2nd edition), the first definition of *amicus* being "a personal friend" (130) and the first of *comes* being "a person who goes with or accompanies another, a companion" (393).

¹⁴ Indeed, Emily Gowers speculates that Heliodorus refers to a book and not a person, which would further explain his status as a *comes* rather than an *amicus*. See Gowers, *Horace, Satires I*, 187-188.

¹⁵ Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 40.

Philomathes

bond or relationship existing between friends” or “a friendly relationship or association, a friendship.”¹⁶ Horace usually places the term *amicus* at ends of lines (in 80% of appearances in Book 1 and 90% in Book 2), which is probably a function of meter more than anything else, since *amicus* fits the dactyl-anceps construction of the last two feet in dactylic hexameter. Nevertheless, *amicus* thus receives a prominent placement at ends of lines and sentences, emphasizing the finality of friendship as an end worth pursuing in Epicurean philosophy.

Thus, this paper analyzes friendship words — *amicus* and *amicitia* — throughout the *Satires* in an effort to illustrate the themes that mentions of friendship have in common across the *Satires*. This method supplements existing scholarship on the *Satires* by offering a systematic investigation of friendship words rather than only discussing friendship and philosophy generally. In this way, greater attention is given to various specific instances in which *amicitia* is mentioned and to what significance the usage of friendship words have for the *Satires* as a whole. Ultimately, this analysis clarifies that Horace uses alternately genuine and deriding descriptions of friendship to express a sense of ambiguity, uncertainty, and discontentment, which even friendship cannot alleviate, in Augustan Rome.

Dissatisfaction with Friendship and Society in Book 1

A superficial reading of Horace’s *Satires* yields a set of overtly Epicurean and seemingly respectable ethical formulations about life and friendship, which are often the most memorable aspects of Horace’s treatment of *amicitia*. Yet such pithy maxims in the context of satire take on a definitively mocking tone that is

¹⁶ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. *amicitia*.

Philomathes

usually overlooked. Perhaps one of the most memorable of these exaggerated precepts is Horace's persona's declaration of the joys of friendship in *Sat.* 1.5. Upon the arrival of Virgil, Varius, and Plotius, Horace's persona first praises them as *animae quales neque candidiores / terra tulit neque quis me sit devinctior alter* ("brighter souls such as the earth never bore or to whom I am more attached," *Sat.* 1.5.41-42) followed by that most often-quoted statement: *nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico* ("there is nothing I would compare to a delightful friend as long as I am sane," *Sat.* 1.5.44).¹⁷ Grand comparatives (*candidiores, devinctior*), correlatives (*quales neque ... terra tulit*) and qualifications (*sanus*) give these statements of Epicurean doctrine an overtone of derision, even if there is truth in these gestures. Horace's persona recites another such tenet of Epicureanism at the end of *Sat.* 1.5, stating his belief that "the gods lead a carefree life and if nature makes something of a wonder, they would not lower it from their high home in the heavens just because they are upset."¹⁸ Here, Horace "overstat[es] his credentials as an Epicurean," as Emily Gowers writes, with a textbook citation from Lucretius, author of the Epicurean work *De Rerum Natura*.¹⁹ Gowers further suggests that this "mock-parroting of agnostic creed" betrays Horace's disdain for "doctrinaire Epicureanism."²⁰ Even if, as Yona argues, the prevalence of Epicureanism in the *Satires* suggests

¹⁷ Horace, *Satires* 1.5.45-6: *Plotius et Varius Sinuessae Vergiliusque / occurrunt, animae quales neque candidiores / terra tulit neque quis me sit devinctior alter. / o qui complexus et gaudia quanta fuerunt! / nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico.*

¹⁸ Horace, *Satires* 1.5.101-3: *namque deos didici securum agere aevom / nec, siquid miri faciat natura, deos id / tristis ex alto caeli demittere tecto.*

¹⁹ Gowers, *Satires*, 212. The Lucretius passage that Gowers cites is *De Rerum Natura*, 5.82-5.83.

²⁰ Gowers, *Satires*, 22.

Philomathes

that Horace genuinely “tackles the moral depravity of his day as an Epicurean moralizer,” there is no doubt that uncertainty and some degree of scorn underlie this moralizing.²¹ Taken together, these over-the-top elaborations on Epicurean ethics illustrate how Horace satirizes Epicurean friendship, which, for all its virtues, cannot remedy the sense of dissatisfaction that permeates the *Satires*.

This dissatisfaction is readily evident in *Sat.* 1.6, in which Horace inveighs against the injustices of Rome’s rigid social hierarchy. Unlike the mockery of *Sat.* 1.5, Horace discusses friendship more frankly in *Sat.* 1.6, using friendship as a respectable foundation on which to build his criticisms of Roman society. So, Horace’s treatment of *amicitia* in the *Satires* is far from consistent, being at times deriding and at others sincere. Most notably contrasting with the satirized Epicurean ethics described above, Horace portrays his relationship with his patron, Maecenas, as one of *amicitia*, with a tone of genuine affection and appreciation. In his autobiographical recounting of their meeting, Horace calls Maecenas an *amicus* in lines 50 (*ita te quoque amicum*) and 53 (*casu quod te sortitus amicum*);²² he also refers to Maecenas’ literary circle as *amici*, describing how, after earning his approval, Maecenas bid him join his “number of friends” (*iubesque esse in amicorum numero*, *Sat.* 1.6.61-62).

Though observers might doubt that patronage relationships were true “friendships” in the modern sense, Craig

²¹ Yona, *Epicurean Ethics*, 6.

²² Horace, *Satires* 1.6.35: *non, ut forsit honorem / iure mihi invidet quivis, ita te quoque amicum, / praesertim cautum dignos assumere, prava / ambitione procul. felicem dicere non hoc / me possim, casu quod te sortitus amicum.*

Philomathes

Williams points out that Roman friendship was inextricably tied to notions of material benefit, and patrons were often described as *amici* to their clients.²³ Modern friendships are ideally supposed to lack this concern for tit-for-tat exchanges, but Roman *amicitia* “is often explicitly a matter of exchanging favors and establishing alliances,” and “the language of favors and gifts (*gratia, beneficium, munus*) lies at the heart of the discourse of *amicitia*.”²⁴ Moreover, Yona points out how Horace’s depiction of his friendship with Maecenas as a comfortable and mutually affectionate relationship rests on “the Epicurean identification of patronage as based on the exchange of philosophical advice for economic benefits, which occurs within the context of intimate friendship.”²⁵ So, Horace’s Epicurean friendship with his patron is depicted more candidly and as a point of pride; through Maecenas’ *amicitia*, Horace gains entrance into Rome’s upper cultural echelon, giving Horace a unique podium as the son of a freedman (*libertino patre natus*, *Sat.* 1.6.45) who has achieved status.

Similarly, Horace presumably achieved status through another patronage friendship with Augustus, the *princeps* and friend of Maecenas, as Suetonius describes how Horace “held a prominent place among the friends of both” Maecenas and Augustus.²⁶ Suetonius further reports that Augustus frequently

²³ Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 45-54.

²⁴ Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 45. This more business-like aspect of *amicitia* aligns with the politically-oriented third definition of *amicitia*, reflecting the multiplicity of meanings *amicitia* could hold, as attested in the Oxford Latin Dictionary (2nd edition), s.v. *amicitia*: “friendship between states or rulers, friendly relations” (130).

²⁵ Yona, *Epicurean Ethics*, 164.

²⁶ Suetonius, “The Life of Horace,” LacusCurtius, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/de_Poetis/Horace*.html. *Ac primo Maecenati, mox Augusto insinuatus non mediocrem in amorum amicitia locum*

Philomathes

extended his friendship to Horace in letters, asking Horace to “enjoy any privilege at my house, as if you were making your home there; for it will be quite right and proper for you to do so, inasmuch as that was the relation which I wished to have with you.”²⁷ Horace moved in the highest possible circles of Roman society, both publicly and privately; even as he benefited from public connections with powerful men, he also enjoyed their private friendships, such as being invited into Augustus’ home. Accordingly, these high-status relationships with Augustus and Maecenas are respectfully depicted.

Horace further elaborates on his virtuous friendships in his discussion of his upbringing, noting that if his character (*natura*) is mostly virtuous (*recta*, *Sat.* 1.6.66) and “if I live dearly with friends, the cause of these things would be my father.”²⁸ By mentioning *amici* at the end of a list of virtues centered on purity (*purus et insons*, *Sat.* 1.6.69), Horace deliberately draws attention to *amicitia* as life’s worthiest endeavor in classic Epicurean fashion. Now, Horace attributes high value to his *amici*, especially Maecenas, with less of the mocking exaggerations that appear in *Sat.* 1.5, suggesting that Horace’s espousal of Epicureanism friendship is at least somewhat genuine. It is even possible that these favorable portrayals of *amicitia* with Maecenas and Augustus were meant

tenuit. Suetonius, *Vita Horati*, The Latin Library, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/suetonius/suet.horace.html>.

²⁷ Suetonius, *The Life of Horace: Sume tibi aliquid iuris apud me, tamquam si convictor mihi fueris; recte enim et non temere feceris, quoniam id usus mihi tecum esse volui, si per validudinem tuam fieri possit.*

²⁸ Horace, *Satires* 1.6.65-71: *atqui si vitiis mediocribus ac mea paucis / mendosa est natura, alioqui recta, velut si / egregio inspersione / rependas corpore naevos, / si neque avaritiam neque sordes nec mala lustra / obiciet vere quisquam mihi, purus et insons, / ut me collaudem, si et vivo carus amicis, / causa fuit pater his...*

Philomathes

as propaganda in support of Augustus at the beginning of his rule, in that they offer a persuasive picture of Rome's most powerful men as "the ideal Roman citizens."²⁹ Yet such mixed messages about *amicitia* themselves play into the atmosphere of contradiction and instability that Horace creates in the *Satires*, reflecting the turbulence of contemporary post-civil war Rome and betraying the anxiety that underlay any pro-Augustan propaganda.

Such a contradiction is exhibited even within *Sat.* 1.6, where Horace clearly extols the virtues of close friendships in the beginning of the satire but ends the poem with a description of how he spends his carefree days blissfully alone (*solus*, *Sat.* 1.6.102). Specifically, he paints a rosy picture of his individual freedom in life outside of politics, explaining that if he were born into the upper class, he would have to travel "with one or two companions lest I go either abroad or to the countryside alone" (*ducendus et unus / et comes alter, uti ne solus rusve peregre exirem*, *Sat.* 1.6.101-102), but as it is, he can travel as far as he likes on his own, unencumbered by the need to "feed many soldiers and horses."³⁰ The absence of obligation is the theme in this list of obligatory gerundives involving interaction with others (*quaerenda, salutandi, ducendus, pascendi*, *Sat.* 1.6.100-104), emphasizing Horace's critique of politics as the embodiment of "oppressive and miserable ambition" (*misera ambitione gravique*, *Sat.* 1.6.129). Rather, free (*solutus*, *Sat.* 1.6.129) of this ambition, Horace can do as he likes, wandering

²⁹ DuQuesnay, "Horace and Maecenas," 57.

³⁰ Horace, *Satires* 1.6.100-5: *nam mihi continuo maior quaerenda foret res / atque salutandi plures, ducendus et unus / et comes alter, uti ne solus rusve peregre <ve> / exirem, plures calones atque caballi / pascendi, ducenda petorrita. nunc mihi curto / ire licet mulo vel si libet usque Tarentum....*

Philomathes

the city alone and at his leisure (*quacumque libido est, incendio solus*, *Sat.* 1.6.111-112). The only people Horace's persona meets in this account of his day-to-day are his slaves, as he explicitly avoids others, shunning crowded places (*fugio Campum lusumque trigonem*, *Sat.* 1.6.126). As a result, by the end of the satire, it seems Horace has completely forgotten about the joys of his *amicitia* with Maecenas, and in fact prefers to be alone. This veritable 180-degree turn is deliberately jarring, and harkens to a more pessimistic view of friends as parasites discussed earlier in the *Satires*, in the parody Epicurean lecture of *Sat.* 1.3.

Food, Pests, and Fabricated Friendship

In *Satires* 1.3, the last of the series of diatribes (which Gowers calls "overtly moralizing poems") that form the beginning of Book 1, Horace's persona discusses friendship at length: forms of *amicus* and *amicitia* appear more in in this satire alone (thirteen times) than in all of Book 2.³¹ Essentially, Horace's persona preaches that friends should tolerate each other's flaws rather than scrutinize them. However, rather than a "peaceable treatise of friendship and tolerance," as Emily Gowers calls it, the speech in *Sat.* 1.3 is closer to a mock-Epicurean sermon, wherein Horace satirizes his own friendship with Maecenas as a parasite relationship, forming the "basis for sustained and rather heavy-handed parody" of Epicurean philosophy.³² William Turpin draws out the precarious similarities between friends and parasites in his analysis of *Satires* 1.1-3, pointing out that both Epicureans and parasites

³¹ Gowers, *Satires*, 118.

³² William Turpin, "The Epicurean Parasite: Horace, 'Satires,' 1.1-3," *Ramus* 27, no. 2 (1998): 130, DOI: 10.1017/S0048671X00001867.

Philomathes

focused on pleasure in the forms of food and drink as well as sex, and that Horace satirizes these blurred lines between friends and parasites in *Sat.* 1.3.90-94:

*conminxit lectum potus mensave catillum/
Euandri manibus tritum deiecit: ob hanc rem,/*
aut positum ante mea quia pullum in parte
catini/ sustulit esuriens, minus hoc iucundus
amicus/ sit mihi?

If someone, because they're drunk, pees on the couch or knocks down from the table a plate touched by Evander's hands; or because he, being hungry, grabs the chicken placed in front of me on my side of the plate, should I consider him a less delightful friend for that?³³

Here, the theoretical friend's exceedingly rude transgressions — urinating on the couch, breaking prized dishes, eating from another's plate — are hilariously similar to the leechlike activities of a parasitical dinner guest, and would test the limits of even the most loving friendship. The adjective *potus* (drunk) and participle *esuriens* (hungry) qualify the boorish action, implying that a good friend will overlook bad behavior due to drunkenness or hunger. In this way, Horace plays into the stereotypes of Epicureans as hedonists, as the ideal of virtuous Epicurean friendship descends into an excuse for the kind of excess and bad manners associated with hedonism. Thus, Horace mocks Epicurean doctrine's dedication to friendship, no matter how ugly, as well as the emphasis on worldly pleasures such as food.

Of course, the risk of friendship being conflated with parasitism is painfully explored in *Satires* 1.9, in which "the

³³ Horace, *Satires* 1.3.90-4. Gowers (ad loc.) notes that the reference to Evander connotes "extreme antiquity."

Philomathes

Pest" plays the classic parasite role by relentlessly hounding Horace's persona on the Via Sacra out of hopes for entry into Maecenas' circle. The pest even praises himself as a potential *amicus* to Horace, arguing that he "could not have a better friend in Viscus nor Varius," should he get to know him (*non Viscum pluris amicum, / non Varium facies, Sat. 1.9.22-23*). Insinuating the worst, Horace takes skepticism of Epicurean friendship to its limits; that such a horrifyingly socially unaware character as the Pest might merely hint at the valued *amicitia* is utterly ridiculous. Yet by placing such discussions of friendship and Maecenas' unbelievably (*vix credibile, Sat. 1.9.52*) flawless circle in the mouth of the cringe worthy pest, Horace makes the interplay between friend and parasite explicit.

On one hand, *Sat. 1.9* in this way serves to reinforce "the 'purity' of [Horace's] own friendship with Maecenas and the other members of his literary circle" in stark contrast to the Pest's flattery.³⁴ But considered in the context of the contradictions that pervade the *Satires*, it is clear that the groveling of the Pest simultaneously highlights the blurred lines between parasitism and friendship, leaving readers unsettled with the notion of Epicurean friendship as a solution to society's ills. Moreover, the need for Horace's persona to defend himself against the Pest's intrusions also hints at Horace's own uncertainty about his role as client and friend to Maecenas, as the Pest cringingly illustrates how *amicitia* with a patron can all too easily descend into parasitism. Thus, Horace's treatment of friendship in Book 2 continues to take on an overall mocking tone, as Horace expresses serious doubts about the virtues of

³⁴ Yona, *Epicurean Ethics*, 200.

Philomathes

Epicurean friendship during the unstable times of the early Roman Empire.

Horace's disappointment with Epicurean friendship grows in Book 2, in which increasingly degrading and sparse mentions of *amicitia* reflect heightened discontentment. This discontentment parallels Horace's life trajectory: by the time Book 2 was published, six years after Book 1, Horace's life was "fully established: plush with creature comforts (a new villa in the Sabine hills, luxurious dinners, famous friends, etc.), but not quite what he was after."³⁵ Finding himself in ever greater limelight after earning fame in his connections with Maecenas and Augustus, Horace had to increasingly suffer the kinds of social duties he so derides in *Sat.* 1.6.³⁶ Adding to Horace's likely stressors were also "all the increasing restrictions of the new regime" under Augustus, as the *princeps* continued to consolidate his rule after his victory over Sextus Pompeius.³⁷ Accordingly, deriding portrayals of *amicitia* detract from friendship's legitimacy in Epicurean philosophy, amplifying the skepticism surrounding *amicitia* in Book 1 into a more pessimistic cynicism in Book 2.

Throughout Book 2, this cynicism is evident in scornful applications of friendship words. For example, the mice in the fable retelling in *Sat.* 2.6 are described as "old friends" (*veterem amicum*, *Sat.* 2.6.81) and address each other as *amici* (*Sat.* 2.6.90). That such insignificant rodents as mice might receive the otherwise exalted title of *amicus* comes across as nothing

³⁵ Freudenburg, *Satires*, 4.

³⁶ Freudenburg, *Satires*, 4-5.

³⁷ Emily Gowers, "The Restless Companion: Horace, *Satires* 1 and 2," in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, ed. Kirk Freudenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48.

Philomathes

less than laughable. Moreover, the friendship itself is dubitable, as both mice fail to appreciate each other's lifestyles; where the city mouse disdains the country mouse's "humble hole" (*paupere cavo*, *Sat.* 2.6.80-81), the country mouse departs the dangerous city with an abrupt goodbye and no intention to return. Considering this relative animosity and lack of mutual respect, the *amicitia* between the mice is doubly ridiculous and, by extension, disappointing for a Roman audience who would have held high expectations for any relationship labelled *amicitia*.

Similarly, Davus, Horace's slave in *Sat.* 2.7, describes himself as a friend to Horace (*amicum mancipium domino*, *Sat.* 2.7.2-3), after which Davus proceeds with an extended diatribe against his master in what can only be described as less than friendly. The appearance of friendship in this poem is facilitated by the festival Saturnalia, in which the roles of slave and master were reversed; in this case, Saturnalia means that Davus is allowed to speak his mind. Although *amicitia* between social unequals was not unheard of, a friendship between master and slave would have been shocking (even during Saturnalia).³⁸ Further undermining the possibility of any *amicitia* between Horace and Davus is that the poem ends with Horace's persona threatening Davus with stones (*lapidem*) and arrows (*sagittas*, *Sat.* 2.7.16-18). Clearly, Davus is not protected by a friendship with Horace. Davus' word choice of *amicus* as a self-descriptor thus contributes to the Saturnalian carnival that characterizes this satire, which inverts social roles and further compounds the sense of uncertainty that pervades the *Satires* and especially Book 2.

³⁸ Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*, 24-26.

Philomathes

These examples of increasingly slim and ridiculous applications of the term *amicus* parallel the usage of food in Book 2, wherein Emily Gowers argues that notions of portion control and ambiguous culinary vocabulary connote confusion and loss of freedom in the Augustan period.³⁹ As Gowers notes, Book 2 overall represents a “breakdown of social communication” and a “*convivium* gone wrong;” though Horace is “eager to dine out,” he ultimately fails to find a companion to the dinner party in *Sat. 2.8 (quarenti convivam, Sat. 2.8.2)*.⁴⁰ In Book 2, not even a *convivam* (dinner guest), much less a full-fledged *amicus*, can help assuage the uncertainties of the times and help Horace lead the Epicurean life of simple pleasure that he purportedly seeks. So, Horace’s search for the Epicurean life fizzles out in a disappointing flop in *Sat. 2.8*, in which Horace must ask his acquaintance Fundanius to recount the dinner party that he missed. In this final satire, *amicus* appears only once: Nomentanus comforts the weeping host, his *amicus* Nasidienus (*sic Nomentanus amicum tolleret, Sat. 2.8.60-61*), after a tapestry falls on the meal with some shallow and laughable proclamations about the cruelty of Fortune.⁴¹ Nomentanus’ attempts to console the host are met with barely concealed snickering (*Varius mappa conpescere risum / vix poterat, Sat. 2.8.63-64*), which highlights Nomentanus’ insincerity and dilutes the appositive of *amicus* applied to Nasidienus.

³⁹ Emily Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 130-135.

⁴⁰ Gowers, *Loaded Table*, 132.

⁴¹ Horace, *Satires*, 2.8.59-63: The end might have been anything, except wise Nomentanus thus raised up his friend: ‘Oh Fortune, what god is crueller to us than you? That you always rejoice to ridicule the affairs of humans!’, The Latin Library, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/serm2.shtml#2.8>.

Philomathes

Characterized by such disingenuous behavior, the dinner party connects food and friendship in a setting of manufactured companionship that slowly crumbles throughout the poem. To this effect, Gowers notes how, in *Sat.* 2.8, “words of separation mark the dissolution of true conviviality: *dissimilem* (28, dissimilar), *districtum* (68, distraught), *divisos* (78, divided), *discerpta* (86, disjointed), *avulsos* (89, torn apart).”⁴² Any sense of companionship and goodwill, however superficial, is completely lost by the end of the satire, as the dinner guests flee the scene without eating (*nos sic fugimus ulți, ut nihil omnino gustaremus*, *Sat.* 2.8.93-94) in a fabulous display of broken-down etiquette.⁴³ Thus, *Sat.* 2.8 is the culmination of Horace’s fears and struggles as expressed in the *Satires*, as not even the scripted interaction of a dinner party succeeds in creating a sense of stability to counteract the tumultuous environment of early Augustan Rome. *Amicitia* is hard to come by in Book 2, and, unlike in Book 1, there are no occasionally sincere expressions of joyful friendship to cut ubiquitous disappointment and uncertainty. In the end, audiences are left with the lingering taste of dissatisfaction, for “Horace’s *satura* is not *satura* (full); his *sermo* has no ending.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

Ultimately, discussions of *amicitia* across the *Satires* are meant to highlight exactly this social and political uncertainty. Superficial praises of *amicitia* juxtapose mocking applications of the term *amicus* to convey a sense of disillusionment with

⁴² Gowers, *Loaded Table*, 166.

⁴³ “We thus fled in revenge, so that we might taste nothing at all.” Horace, *Satires*, 2.8.94-94, The Latin Library, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/serm2.shtml#2.8>.

⁴⁴ Gowers, *Loaded Table*, 179.

Philomathes

Roman society and politics in the early Roman Empire. By satirizing *amicitia* in this way, Horace mocks one of the pillars of the elite male society in which he participates, suggesting a lack of faith in the ability of friendship to uphold a rapidly changing Roman socio-political environment after the civil war. Moreover, this satirical treatment of specifically Epicurean friendship suggests a lack of faith in philosophy to provide direction, either. The skepticism in Horace's judgments is further compounded by his position as a relative outsider to the Roman upper class. Horace may be suggesting that he is someone who can perhaps never be fully comfortable in his friendships with the likes of Maecenas and Augustus.

Introduced in Book 1, descriptions of these friendships are initially flavored with a degree of sincerity, as Horace explains his appreciation of Maecenas' *amicitia* in *Sat.* 1.6. Immediately after the civil war with Sextus Pompeius, Horace is grateful for a measure of acceptance and stability in Rome's upper class. As such, some genuine discussions of the value of *amicitia* accompany more satirical portrayals in Book 1 to convey mixed opinions and conflicting thoughts in the mid-30s BCE. However, Horace's discomfort grows in Book 2, by which time he is materially comfortable but still philosophically dissatisfied. Subject to increased social pressures and tighter political constraints under Augustus' rule, Horace's persona in Book 2 is relegated to the sidelines, as other speakers take over (for example, Davus in *Sat.* 2.7 and Fundanius in *Sat.* 2.8).⁴⁵ Accordingly, mentions of the once-promising *amicitia* are cut down from thirty-two references in Book 1 to only twelve

⁴⁵ Gowers, "The Restless Companion," 48.

Philomathes

references in Book 2, with little of the appreciative expressions exhibited in Book 1.

This growing dissatisfaction with friendship is further tied to depictions of food and eating, in which superficial friends — pests, even — dominate dinner parties and meals, casting even greater doubt on the social structure of *amicitia* as a means for maintaining social unity. Yet if any one feature characterizes the *Satires*, it is contradiction, as Horace consistently vacillates on the issues, including Epicurean friendship. Between all the usages of *amicus* and *amicitia* throughout both books of the *Satires*, the common theme is uncertainty. Horace mocks Epicurean friendship in *Sat* 1.3 and *Sat* 1.5 even as he both extols and implicitly rejects it in *Sat* 1.6, while calling it into greater question in *Sat.* 1.9, 2.6, and 2.8. For this reason, it is difficult to spy a clear message in Horace's discussions of *amicitia* in the *Satires*. Yet this uncertainty is arguably the very message that Horace intends audiences to receive. In this way, Horace employs the revered concept of *amicitia* as well as his respected position among Maecenas' and Augustus' *amici* to express a thought-provoking dissatisfaction with turbulent contemporary times.

Shannon Fetzner
Truman State University
sef5286@truman.edu

Philomathes

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Philomathes

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