

“He Did It Like a Man?”: Patronage, Power, and Masculinity in Horace’s *Epistles* 1

In *Epistles* 1.1 Horace casts himself as Maecenas’s social inferior and establishes an erotic framework for analyzing their friendship. He compares himself in 1.1.8-9 to an old, retired racehorse that Maecenas wants back in competition, adopting a metaphor found in erotic lyric poetry whereby the pederastic *eromenos* is figured as a horse and the *erastes* his rider (cf. e.g. Theognis 1249-52, 1267-70; Ibycus fr. 287). Horace is thus too old to play a subordinate *eromenos* to Maecenas’s dominant *erastes*. Horace’s real concerns involve power and status, and the sexual metaphor conveys his refusal to become servile to his patron. In Roman ideology an *eromenos* was a role for which only slaves were suitable, and Horace sees the position of client as similarly threatening to his autonomy. Oliensis (1997) first examined the erotic associations of the patron-client relationship, and this paper scrutinizes the unfolding of this theme across *Epistles* 1 and connects it to Horace’s larger concerns of freedom and power. In 1.1 Horace evokes the hierarchical structure of pederasty but by the end of the collection transforms it into a model for patronage in which the roles of *eromenos* and *erastes* are blurred. Horace recommends *amicitia* only when power and its loss are shared and when dominant and submissive roles are replaced with a more egalitarian structure.

The two poems most concerned with patronage are 1.17 and 1.18, in which Horace instructs his addressees on how to assume the role of *cliens* while maintaining independence. The main question is whether a client can “please” (*placuisse*, 1.17.35 – a sexually charged word) the powerful with his masculinity intact: *fecitne viriliter*, “he did it like a man?,” 1.17.38. Whereas at times in these poems Horace’s depictions of the *cliens* align him with feminine sexual passivity, Horace here suggests that the client can simultaneously play an active, masculine role in his interactions with a patron, especially in comparison with those who

disavow patronage entirely. The trick is that each party yield some power to the other. Horace models much of his advice on that found in Tibullus 1.4, in which Priapus outlines strategies that a would-be *erastes* can use to seduce young *eromenoi*. In the Tibullan poem the *erastes* is to grant power to the *eromenos* and conquer him with *obsequium*, “compliance” (40), a trait normally associated with social inferiors. He should yield (*cedas*, 40) when the boy wants company on a journey and carry the nets when he wants to hunt. So complete is the power reversal that it is the *erastes* who adopts the passive role of “pleasing” (*placeas*, 50) his beloved. In this way the Tibullan pederast conforms to the role of *servus amoris*, an elegiac trope that upsets the traditional configuration whereby the *erastes* maintains dominant masculinity. The pederastic relationship outlined by Tibullus entails a careful negotiation of power, and the *erastes* prevails only when he yields some authority to his inferior. Yet when the Tibullan *eromenos* takes up the role of a prostitute demanding gifts, pederastic persuasion is replaced with a strict financial exchange in which bonds of affection and compromise are impossible.

In the *Epistles* the client plays the role of the Tibullan *erastes*. He too must yield to his patron’s demands (*cede*, 1.88.44) and accompany him as he hunts (1.18.40, 44) and travels (1.17.52). He likewise must adopt the passive role of “pleasing” his powerful friends (*placuisse*, 1.17.35). Though such acts are traditionally associated with social inferiors, Horace’s modeling of his client on Tibullus’s *erastes* confuses the power hierarchy. The client’s loss of power, like that of the *erastes*, is voluntary and done at his own instigation rather than being imposed upon him from above. The client retains as much independence as he yields and enjoys a friendship based upon mutual esteem rather than desire for gain. The patron in turn must allow his client time for autonomous pursuits such as poetry and philosophy and not make demands that compromise his client’s virility (*viriliter*, 1.7.38; *virilia*, 1.18.52) or manliness (*virtus*, 1.17.41;

*virtutem*, 1.18.100). As in Tibullus, Horace censures *amicitia* based upon meretricious demands (1.17.55, 1.18.3) and warns that such financial exchange will never lead to longstanding, affectionate *amicitia*. Such friendship empowers rather than disempowers the client, and this is why Horace can end the collection by broadcasting his social success as a process of accumulating “manliness” (*virtutibus*, 1.20.22) through “pleasing” (*placuisse*, 1.20.23) the city’s elite.

### Bibliography

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