Horace (65-8 B C)

* Quintus Horatius Flaccus
* Horace was one of the greatest Roman poets.
* His ideas about poetry and drama appear in *Epistle to the Pisos*, which is in verse form.
* Later his work was called *Ars Poetica* by Quintilian, another Roman writer. (35-95 A D) Ars Poetica = The Art of Poetry
* Horace wrote under Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar.
* After the coming of Octavius there was an end to civil strife and concentration of power in the emperor.
* This led to a decline of rhetoric (public speech) and poetry/literature emerged more prestigious in this space.
* In *Ars Poetica*, Horace is a poet writing to other poets about how to write good poetry.
* Plato and Aristotle were theoreticians and teachers discussing the theoretical and philosophical aspects of art. (In other words they were not writing a book of instructions or a manual for writing good poetry.)
* Horace follows the ideas of Aristotle to a great extent.
* Horace was a classicist, i.e., he advocated the revival of old (classical) Greek literary traditions, which he considered to be superior to the recent Roman and Alexandrian traditions.
* He had great admiration for Greek masters like Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Homer et al.
* He tells aspiring poets to follow the great Greek masters.
* The function of poetry, according to him is to both please and teach.
* Horace, in *Epistle to Pisos*, aims to teach the art and craft of poetry to aspiring poets (to the Piso brothers), who wish to be accomplished in the arts.
* The book discusses poetry and drama.
* Unlike Aristotle, (who gave importance to epic poetry and tragedy), Horace gives importance to satire/comedy and lyric poetry. (Horace wrote satires and lyric poetry.)
* He discusses the subject matter in three divisions:

1. Poesis – the subject matter or theme
2. Poema - the form of the poem
3. Poeta – poet/author.

* According to Horace, the function of poetry is to instruct (teach) and to delight (please). Here he combines Plato and Aristotle.
* The central principle/idea for Horace is decorum (suitability or appropriateness).
* Decorum: All the elements in a work should agree with one another gracefully.

1. Character to genre (tragedy/comedy/epic)
2. Speech and action to character
3. Style of language to genre and subject matter, etc.

* We can say that under the basic idea of decorum he address three important topics:

1. Art and nature (There should be natural talent but it should be cultivated/nurtured suitably.)
2. Function of art – both delight and instruction
3. Honest criticism is necessary for the development of poetry or art.

* Horace on decorum(Aspects of decorum)
  + - 1. Unity (e.g., not mixing wild and gentle elements )
      2. Appropriateness
      3. Style suited to subject
      4. Newness or inventions
      5. Credible characterization
      6. Observance of decency (in subject, treatment, language etc.)
      7. A fine metre and rhythm
      8. Good understanding. (Horace says the Greeks had such understanding but the Romans lacked it because of their ‘lust for profit’. Thus, according to Horace, these elements and similar ones contribute to decorum in writing.

\*\*\*\*\* Biju Joseph’s class notes; typed by Sr Savitha \*\*\*\*\*