1999

Steele's Independent Essays in the Spectator as examples of Horatian Satire

Katie Martin

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research/91
Steele's Independent Essays in the *Spectator* as examples of Horatian Satire

A Senior Project

by

Katie Martin

Presented to
The Southern Scholars Honors Committee
March 29, 1999

Supervised by Dr. Jan Haluska
OUTLINE

Thesis: Sir Richard Steele’s independent essays in the *Spectator* are clearly examples of Horatian satire

Introduction

I. The *Spectator* as Horatian satire
   A. Definition of satire
   B. History of satire
      1. Juvenal
      2. Horace
   C. Definition of Horatian satire
   D. Steel as a Horatian satirist
      1. Style
         a. Fictitious characters
         b. Comical tone
      2. Purpose
         a. Entertainment
         b. Edification
      3. Structure
      4. Content
         a. List of Steele’s subjects
         b. List of Horace’s subjects
         c. Treatment of subjects
         d. Personal reference
         e. Use of detail

Conclusion
Sir Richard Steele's Independent Essays in the *Spectator* as Examples of Horatian Satire

By Katie Martin

Ridiculum acri fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.

Horace

Jesting oft cuts hard knots more forcefully and effectively than gravity.

(Satire X, lns. 14-15)

On March 5, 1711, Sir Richard Steele declared that he would "publish a Sheet-full of Thoughts every Morning, for the Benefit of [his] contemporaries" (Number 4). With the help of his friend Joseph Addison, he went on to create the most widely read of eighteenth-century periodical essays, the *Spectator*.

In the course of the *Spectator's* original 555 issue run, Richard Steele contributed 251 papers, 89 of which are independent essays. Their lasting charm is due, in part, to the satire they include. In nearly every one of Steele's papers, "the satire is there, all the more effective for being unobtrusive" (Bond, xxxvi). It is gentle satire, patterned after the fashion of the great Roman satirist, Horace. Though it would be a stretch to say that Steele was consciously imitating Horace, there can be little doubt that Steele was well-educated concerning his Roman predecessor. His papers are clearly Horatian, not only in style, but in structure, purpose and content.

Satire is defined in Webster's Dictionary as "a type of literary composition in which vice and folly are held up to
ridicule." The great literary critic Quintilian proudly claims "satira quidem tota nostra est" (Qtd in Goold, xiv), meaning "satire is completely our [Roman] creation." Horace maintains that the inventor of literary satire was Gaius Lucilius, who lived from 180 to 103 B.C. (Goold, xv). From those who followed Lucilius came two great schools of satire: Juvenalian and Horatian.

Juvenal followed directly from the pattern of Lucilius, and often in his writings and in the writing of his followers are found "excessive coarseness", "fierce invective" and "unrestrained ... criticism of others." These elements in the works of Horace, however, are strictly limited to the first book, and are "due to our poet's following here too closely in the footsteps of Lucilius" (Goold, xv).

It was not long before Horace "cast off the spell of Lucilius" and began to develop his own distinctive form, showing that he was "completely independent of his model." Horatian satire tends to take a "kindly and genial tone", disguising its attacks in humorous form (Goold, xxi).

Horatian satire shows "the sentiments of a polite philosopher, who is concerned to see the absurdities of mankind." He sometimes "diverts himself" with those absurdities and berates them through "general portraits of human life." If he occasionally becomes particular it is not to offend but "to enliven the subject, and put the moral ... into action."

Horace's characters generally are fictitious: real persons named
are only those "who were universally decried, and had no longer any pretence to reputation" (Batteux, qtd in Weinbrot, 129).

This all holds true in the writings of Steele. His satire is "firmly rooted in the comfortable conviction of the age that men are free and responsible beings, who can set about improving themselves and their society by the exercise of reason" (Elkin, 9). To this end, Steele created such characters as Inkle and Yarico (Number 11), Laetitia and Daphne (Number 33), James and Elizabeth (Number 71), the French prince Pharamond (Numbers 76, 84, 97 and 480), Cynthio and Flavia (Number 398), Basilius and his son (Number 426), Will Trap and Jack Stint (Number 448), Fidelia (Number 449), Rhynsault and Sapphira (Number 491) and others. Through them he creates scenes from the absurd realities of life. He points out folly and vice in his readers while standing at their side and laughing with them at another, who being fictitious, cannot suffer from the jest.

Mr. Spectator himself is a fictitious character. Steele uses this persona not only as a catch-point for the paper (part of the fun of the Spectator was that no one could figure out who he was), but also as a satirical device to help keep the Juvenalian bite out of his calls to morality. As he points out in Number 555, his final essay in which he reveals himself to the world,

It is much more difficult to converse with the World in a real than a personated Character. That might pass of Humour, in the Spectator, which would look like Arrogance in a Writer who sets his Name to his Work. The Fictitious Person might contemn those who disapproved of him, and extoll his own Performances,
without giving Offence. He might assume a mock-
Authority, without being looked upon as vain and
conceited. The Praises or Censures of himself fall
only upon the Creature of his Imagination, and if any
one finds fault with him, the Author may reply with the
Philosopher of old, *Thou dost but beat the Case of
Anaxarchus.* When I speak in my own private Sentiments,
I cannot but address my self to my Readers in a more
submissive manner, and with a just Gratitude, for the
kindly Reception which they have given to these Dayly
Papers that have been published for almost the space of
Two Years last past.

In this way, he neatly removes himself as an antagonist,
begging the "License allowable to a feigned Character", allowing
the reproofs to stand alone. Without a known rebuker, it is
difficult for the rebuked to dismiss the works of the satirist.
Steele knew this, and uses it to package up his calls to morality
in humor.

Steele, following in the footsteps of his Roman predecessor,
carefully preserves a comical, mocking tone when pointing out the
follies of his readers, mocking vice and praising virtue. For
example, in Number 33 Steele takes a position against vanity, but
instead of berating the vain and enumerating the evils of
thinking too much of oneself, Steele creates two fictitious
characters, Laetita and Daphne; "The Former is one of the
Greatest Beauties of the Age in which she lives, the Latter in no
way remarkable for any Charms in her Person." To this pair of
sisters he introduces a suitor, who had seen Laetita at a play
and "become her captive." The suitor manages to gain access to
the house, but not to Laetita, who remains "sullen, grave and
disconsolate." Daphne, on the other hand, is "cheerful, open and
unconcerned", and a friendship is struck up between the pair. In
time, the suitor "sees the light" as it were, and declares himself to Daphne, who laughs at him "with that ingenuous and pleasing Mirth, which is natural to a Woman without Design." But the suitor is in earnest and appeals to her father who receives this as quite welcome news. The marriage is arranged, and it is clear that a pleasant nature has succeeded where beauty failed. In this way, Steele holds up virtue to praise and vice to condemnation, all the while keeping his readers comfortably entertained, and none can take offense.

This is the tone of Steele’s work. His writings are meant to edify, but also to entertain. Like the modern satirists Bill Cosby or Jerry Seinfeld, Steele comically wrings his hands at the oddities of society, indulging his audience with a wink and a smile—but the audience smiles because they know that what he says is true. There is something familiar, something comfortable in Horatian satire. The scenes are ones readers are familiar with, taken from the daily business of life. Bill Cosby announces that his wife is having a baby. Jerry Seinfeld announces he is late for an appointment. Richard Steele announces he has seen a play. Horace announces he is going out for a walk. It is the realness, the presentness, the immediacy of their writings that is the key to their success.

The Horatian voice often is comfortable, secure, harsh when necessary, but normally inclusive and conversant with the age’s great men, to whom it speaks as a moral equal. His satires offer gentle philosophy, avuncular guidance, an understanding of fallibility, and a willingness to correct it where possible and endure it where necessary (Weinbrot, 129).
It is smiling, not savage satire. In the *Tatler*, Steele had pointed out that pleasantry is indispensable in satire as a means of showing that the author bears no ill will. If the satire is angry, rude and offensive, it will be dismissed as an expression of a personal grudge. If its tone is good-humored, it will win the attention of its readers (Elkin, 147).

London was ready to give its attention to something new. In coffee-houses for the perusal of the reading public at the time of Mr. Spectator's appearance were such papers as Dr. King's *Philosophical Transactions*, Mr. Ozell's *Monthly Amusement*, Defoe's *Review*, the *Observer*, the Tory *Examiner*, the *Medley* and the *Whig Examiner*, to name a few. Into the fray came Steele's new periodical, and at once it received acclaim. John Gay, writing in May of 1711, describes the amazement and delight of London when the *Spectator* appeared—-not just three times a week, as had the *Tatler* (a forerunner of the *Spectator*, also authored by Richard Steele), but every day. According to Gay, Mr. Spectator had "come on like a Torrent and swept away all before him." After a threatened deluge of would-be imitators of Squire Bickerstaff (the fictitious character of the *Tatler*) the new paper had become "our shelter from that Flood of False Wit and Impertinence which was breaking in upon us." Soon it was "in every one's Hand, and a constant Topik for our Morning conversation at Tea-Tables, and coffee-houses" (Qtd in Bond xv). These sentiments were not unique to Gay. Mr. Tate printed the following verses in Number 488:
When first the Tatler to a Mute was turn'd,
Great Britain for her Censor's silence mourn'd.
Robb'd of his sprightly Beams she wept the Night,
Till the Spectator rose, and blaz'd as bright.

No wonder he wrote these lines. People like to be entertained, and they are seldom adverse to being improved so long as there is no threat to them involved. At the time the Spectator appeared in London, the population was all but crying for another Horace to point out their follies and teach them to be educated, virtuous citizens.

In Number 113, Steele shows that he is master of this art of gentle reproof. In this paper, he tells the story (introduced but not developed in Number 2) of what took place between Sir Roger de Coverley and the widow. This piece, in which poor Roger is ill-used by a woman who treats all men in a similar manner—enjoying their admiration and attention but dismissing them full of false hopes and aspirations, speaks out against cruelty in the fair sex. Written by any other hand, it would look like a bitter charge against inaccessible women, but even as readers feel sorry for Roger, there is no sense of bitterness in the piece—only a gentle reproof given in kindest terms from a smiling face.

In Number 422, Steele reiterates the point that a pleasant tone is indispensable in satire, but he goes further than merely advocating the practical advantages of a pleasant tone in order to make a good impression. In his opinion "to hurt a person's feelings is to do him mortal injury; joking is all very well, but it must truly be joking—it is no joke to be publicly humiliated" (Elkin, 152).
To say a thing which perplexes the Heart of him you speak to, or brings blushes into his Face, is a degree of Murder; and it is, I think, an unpardonable Offense to shew a Man you do not care, whether he is pleased or displeased.

Steele took great care not to offend, and it is well that he did, because he occasionally had some very direct things to say to his fellow citizens. In Number 427, for example, Steele has had enough of the defamation he sees going on in London, and makes a pointed attack on "Invention, quick Utterance, and unprovoked Malice." He makes his point, quickly and clearly, but he does it by telling a story.

Steele makes up a laughable old woman, Lady Bluemantle, who imagines herself to be living at times under the roof of nearly every person in town, and as a consequence of living there, she knows all the stories about everyone. She relates these inventions with glee to anyone who will listen, and as a result is quite a source of mirth for the town. Steele very pointedly tells all storytellers that they would do well to check their sources, as "there is a voluntary Lady Bluemantle at every visit in town."

Steele’s writings tend to follow those of Horace in more ways than just in tone. Structurally, too, they show a great deal of similarity. The satire of Horace is "bi-partite in structure", meaning that a particular vice or folly is attacked in the first part, and its opposite virtue praised in the second. There is always more attack than praise, "since, paradoxically, in the very act of presenting the negative or destructive side of
human behavior the satirist is establishing a positive foundation on which he can base his specific recommendation to virtue" (Randolph, qtd in Weinbrot, 11).

The satire of Steele often follows much the same form. For example, Number 75, a satire concerning the deportment of fine gentlemen, begins with a short, humorous introduction of the subject—a lady railing to Mr. Spectator about his view on who was and was not a gentleman—followed by a page and a half exposing those who only seem to be gentlemen, and finishing with a paragraph explaining what a gentleman really ought to be.

Number six, an essay about the abuse of understanding, provides a text-book formula for Horatian satire. The topic is introduced with the fictitious Sir Roger de Coverly informing the readers that "he was of Opinion none but Men of fine Parts deserve to be hanged." The satire continues to make buffoons of those who practice false wit, ending rather abruptly (as was characteristic of Horace) with a tale from ancient Greece and the admonition, "understand what is good, but ... practice it."

Clearly, then, there are similarities in tone and structure, but most important is content, and here above all there are striking similarities between the works of Steele and those of Horace. Both men are concerned primarily with the business of living, aiming their writings at the common people in society. Steele goes a step farther than Horace by including women in his audience, even going so far as to state that he would "take it for the greatest Glory of [his] Work, if among reasonable Women
this Paper may furnish *Tea-Table Talk*" (Number 4). Steele seems to have had a particular affection for women. He states that "I look upon myself as a kind of Guardian to the Fair, and am always watchful to observe any thing which concerns their interest" (Number 423). Naturally, if his paper was to "furnish *Tea-Table Talk*" for these women, it follows that he should display a concern with the dress, education, talents and proper duties of "the most beautiful Part of the Creation" (Number 57). He steadfastly refuses to take any part whatsoever in political debates, centering his work exclusively on subjects "ranging from reflection on the latest happening in London or Paris to contemplation of the universe and man's place in it" (Bond, xiii). The paper aimed at "softening the rough edges of life, raising the general standards of morality, and at the same time providing interesting material for thought and conversation" (Bond, xix). It was to be "a Kind of Letter of News, but it regards rather what passes in the world of conversation than that of Business" (Number 468). In Number 10, Steele's collaborator, Addison, explains the purpose of the paper:

I shall endeavor to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their Account in the Speculation of the Day. ... It was said of *Socrates*, that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven, to inhabit among Men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out the closets and Libraries, Schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses.
This he did in great style. London’s reading public devoured the *Spectator* as voraciously as they did their beloved coffee. By this they were not only instructed and improved, but also informed of the latest happenings in London. Subject matter was relevant, immediate, and written in such a way as to grab the interest of the thousands of people who lived simple lives with no claim to fame. Listed together with their subjects, Steele’s independent essays in the *Spectator* are:

**VOLUME I**

Number 2  (2 March, 1711)  Introduction of the club
Number 4  (5 March, 1711)  Mr. Spectator’s manner
Number 6  (7 March, 1711)  The abuse of understanding
Number 11 (13 March, 1711)  Constancy in love
Number 19 (22 March, 1711)  Envy
Number 33 (7 April, 1711)  Vanity
Number 49 (26 April, 1711)  The men in a coffee-house
Number 64 (14 May, 1711)  The fashions of mourning
Number 65 (15 May, 1711)  On “Sir Fopling Flutter”
Number 71 (22 May, 1711)  The foolishness of lovers
Number 75 (26 May, 1711)  The fine gentleman
Number 76 (28 May, 1711)  The prince *Pharamond*
Number 82 (4 June, 1711)  Debt
Number 84 (6 June, 1711)  Dueling
Number 91 (14 June, 1711)  “History of the Rival Mother”
Number 97 (21 June, 1711)  Dueling
Number 100 (23 June, 1711)  Contented living
Number 103 (28 June, 1711)  False civilities
Number 107 (3 July, 1711)  Sir Roger and his servants
Number 109 (5 July, 1711)  Family portraits
Number 113 (10 July, 1711)  Sir Roger and the widow
Number 114 (11 July, 1711)  Pretended fortune
Number 118 (16 July, 1711)  Sir Roger and the widow

**VOLUME II**

Number 132 (1 August, 1711)  A pompous coachman
Number 133 (2 August, 1711)  Reflections on death
Number 138 (8 August, 1711)  Pointless oration
Number 139 (9 August, 1711)  Love of glory
Number 143 (14 August, 1711)  Living in good humor
Number 144 (15 August, 1711)  Beauty
Number 146 (17 August, 1711)  The reading of philosophy
Number 148 (20 August, 1711)  The pert and talkative
Number 151 (23 August, 1711)  The man of wit and pleasure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>(24 August, 1711)</td>
<td>The soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>(25 August, 1711)</td>
<td>Old age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
<td>(29 August, 1711)</td>
<td>The man of wit and pleasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>(30 August, 1711)</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>(17 Sept, 1711)</td>
<td>True vs. seeming worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174</td>
<td>(19 Sept, 1711)</td>
<td>The art of agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>(5 October, 1711)</td>
<td>True vs. seeming worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193</td>
<td>(11 October, 1711)</td>
<td>Patrons and clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>(19 October, 1711)</td>
<td>Ambition of princes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>(26 October, 1711)</td>
<td>True vs. seeming worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214</td>
<td>(5 November, 1711)</td>
<td>Patrons and clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>(9 November, 1711)</td>
<td>Fame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
<td>(19 November, 1711)</td>
<td>Painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248</td>
<td>(14 December, 1711)</td>
<td>The art of pleasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td>(27 December, 1711)</td>
<td>Outward salutations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>(2 January, 1712)</td>
<td>Irus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
<td>(4 January, 1712)</td>
<td>Prostitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>(9 January, 1712)</td>
<td>On &quot;The Scornful lady&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>(21 January, 1712)</td>
<td>The art of pleasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290</td>
<td>(1 February, 1712)</td>
<td>On &quot;The Distressed Mother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>294</td>
<td>(6 February, 1712)</td>
<td>The art of pleasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>340</td>
<td>(31 March, 1712)</td>
<td>Merit and modesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>346</td>
<td>(7 April, 1712)</td>
<td>The act of benignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>(11 April, 1712)</td>
<td>Magnanimity and courage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>352</td>
<td>(14 April, 1712)</td>
<td>Truth and integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>356</td>
<td>(18 April, 1712)</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>358</td>
<td>(21 April, 1712)</td>
<td>Useful jesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>370</td>
<td>(2 May, 1712)</td>
<td>Acting a part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>374</td>
<td>(9 May, 1712)</td>
<td>The proper use of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>386</td>
<td>(23 May, 1712)</td>
<td>Being agreeable in company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>390</td>
<td>(28 May, 1712)</td>
<td>Gossip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>(2 June, 1712)</td>
<td>Judicious use of skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>(6 June, 1712)</td>
<td>Cynthio and Flavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>(9 June, 1712)</td>
<td>Wantonness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>422</td>
<td>(4 July, 1712)</td>
<td>Ridicule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>423</td>
<td>(5 July, 1712)</td>
<td>The games of love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>426</td>
<td>(9 July, 1712)</td>
<td>Basilius and his son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>427</td>
<td>(10 July, 1712)</td>
<td>Defamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>428</td>
<td>(11 July, 1712)</td>
<td>The Spectator's scope enlarged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>436</td>
<td>(21 July, 1712)</td>
<td>A sword fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>438</td>
<td>(23 July, 1712)</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>(28 July, 1712)</td>
<td>A solicitation for letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>444</td>
<td>(30 July, 1712)</td>
<td>Quackery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>448</td>
<td>(4 August, 1712)</td>
<td>Will Trap and Jack Stint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>449</td>
<td>(5 August, 1712)</td>
<td>Fidelia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>(11 August, 1712)</td>
<td>A trip to London</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In his choice of subject matter, Steele is walking hand in hand with Horace. The great Roman satirist was also concerned primarily with the daily events in the lives of the every-day people. Horatian satirists do not usually write to the kings and princes of the nation. They are writing to Sir No-one-at-all who lives in the wagon-wheel-meets-the-road, work-a-day world.

Compare these subjects with the following list of Horace's subject matter:

**BOOK I**
- Satire I  The race for wealth and position
- Satire II The folly of running to extremes
- Satire III On mutual forbearance
- Satire IV A defence of satire
- Satire V A journey to Brundisium
- Satire VI On social and political ambition
- Satire VII A battle of wit
- Satire VIII Priapus and the witches
- Satire IX An unwelcome companion
- Satire X On satire

**BOOK II**
- Satire I  A shot at critics
- Satire II A discourse on plain living
- Satire III The follies of mankind
- Satire IV The art of good living
- Satire V The art of legacy-hunting
- Satire VI Town and country life
- Satire VII Only the wise are free
- Satire VIII A fiasco of a dinner-party
Not only is the subject matter itself strikingly similar, but the treatment of these subjects within the works themselves is similar as well. Compare, for instance, Satire I in Horace’s first book of satires, probably, according to Palmer, "the last composed of those in the first book" (Qtd in Goold, 3), with Number 19 of Steele’s satires. Both are written against envy, especially the desire to be what another is. Horace writes,

If some god were to say: "Here I am! I will grant your prayers forthwith. You, who were but now a soldier, shall be a trader; you but now a lawyer, shall be a farmer. Change parts; away with you--and with you! Well! Why standing still?" They would refuse, and yet 'tis in their power to be happy.

Steele reworks this theme, pointing out that every man who wishes he were another but robs himself of enjoying pleasures which ought to be his:

The Envious Man is in Pain upon all Occasions which ought to give him Pleasure. The Relish of his Life is inverted, and the Objects which administer the highest Satisfaction to those who are exempt from this Passion, give the quickest Pangs to Persons who are subject to it.

He goes on to point out the odd characteristics of envious men, among them the desire to hoard property (both wealth and praise) they cannot possibly use for the sole purposes of seeing that it does not fall into the hands of another.

The most unusual Succour to the Envious, in cases of nameless Merit in this kind, is to keep the Property, if possible, unfixed, and by that means to hinder the reputation of it from falling upon any particular Person.

Horace continues this theme, enlarging upon it, and pointing out the absolute absurdity of such an activity.
What good to you is a vast weight of silver and gold, 
if in terror you stealthily bury it in a hole in the 
ground? "But if one splits it up, it would dwindle to 
a paltry penny." Yet, if that is not done, what beauty 
has the piled-up heap? . . . A certain Ummidius--'tis a 
short story--so rich that he measured his money, so 
miserly that he dressed no better than a slave; up to 
his last hour he feared he would die of starvation.

Though Steele was probably not intentionally parroting 
Horace (he says that the essay on envy was occasioned by 
overhearing one of his papers praised in a coffee-house one day), 
it is clear that Steele is writing Horatian satire.

London received this new Horace with open arms. So great 
was the success of the *Spectator* that by the end of its run it 
had become a natural medium of communication, advertising lost 
articles, setting appointments, even being quoted in the House of 
Commons. Whatever the circulation of the daily issues was (Bond 
estimates about four thousand) many of the essays were 
undoubtedly read aloud to those who frequented the numerous 
coffee-houses, then a prominent feature of London, so there was 
an even wider reading public for the paper than the names which 
appeared on the list of subscribers (Bond, lxxxiv). "How much 
profit it made for its authors and publisher is unknown, but it 
had an extremely large circulation for a literary paper and it 
was one of the few periodicals to survive the stamp tax imposed 
at the beginning of August 1712" (Bond, lxx). In Number 10, 
Addison makes a "modest computation" in which he estimates twenty 
readers to every paper--a staggering 80,000 possible daily 
readers of the periodical. It had come to be assumed that 
everyone read the *Spectator*. 
Letters to Mr. Spectator posted from Exeter, Norwich, Bath, Edinburgh, and Dublin indicate that the Spectator was read throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, and there is even evidence of its making an appearance in the New World. In Boston, Rev. Cotton Mather noted in his diary his intention of "sending some agreeable things" to the author of the Spectator, that "there may be brought forward some Services to the best Interests in the Nation" (Qtd in Bond xli). Benjamin Franklin, then in his teens, found the third volume of the Spectator, which "so delighted him with its excellent writing that he used it as a means of learning to write effective prose" (Bond, lxxxv). From the Governor of York Fort in Sumatra we have this excerpt from a letter addressed to Richard Steele, "The Spectator has visited me in this Side the Globe; his conversation relieves me from the fatigue of business; by him I am always entertain’d and often improv’d" (Qtd in Bond lxxxvi). In addition to these, prominent names registered among the subscribers of the Spectator include the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor Harcourt and Sir Isaac Newton.

Though names of many prominent individuals grace the list, the bulk of readers were from the great and increasing middle-class, a public which grew exponentially in numbers and importance as the century continued. "It is the success of the Spectator . . . which formed a new reading public in England and helped to create a taste for books among many persons who had
hitherto taken little heed of literature" (Beljame, qtd in Bond, lxxxiii).

There can be no doubt that Mr. Spectator owes this great success to his continual concern with everyday life experience. For subject matter, satirists often look to the world around them, seeking to comment upon the times and ways, and improve them if possible. As Stevens states so deliciously, "the vice and folly which overspread human nature first created the satirist" (Qtd in Elkin, 44). To this precedent, set by Lucilius and followed by Horace, Steele is not an exception. All three satirists delight in the use of personal references to enrich and enliven their prose and have left behind vivid portraits of life in their respective ages.

The Satires of Lucilius were largely autobiographical, and if they had survived intact we should to-day have a complete picture of the poet’s life and times as any modern diarist has given of his. Lucilius portrayed not only himself but also his friends and foes, and at the same time discoursed upon the follies and vices of his day, as well as upon philosophy, religion, literature, and grammar; upon travels and adventures; upon eating and drinking and the many incidents of daily life (Goold, xvi).

The satires of Horace express his personal feelings, pass judgement upon the literary and social problems of his time, "deal with human foibles and frailties, discuss philosophic principles, open windows upon the poet’s domestic circle, and give us incidents and scenes from daily life" (Goold, xxi).

So it had been with Lucilius, so it was with Horace, so it became with Steele. This, it seems, is the basis of the enduring charm of his little satires.
In his essays, eighteenth-century London lives and breathes. "Present-day interest in the *Spectator* derives to a great extent . . . from the vivid picture which it gives of ordinary daily life" (Bond, lxi). The writings of Steele (especially when paired with those of Addison) provide a virtually inexhaustible source of information about the way people lived. In the *Spectator*, we find the names of their dances (Number 2), the cosmetics they used (Number 33), their breakfast and reading habits (Number 49), their fashions of mourning (Number 64), the plays they attended (Numbers 65, 270, 290, 370 and 520), the manner in which they fought duels (Numbers 84, 91 and 97), the content of their conversations (Number 103), the style of women's petticoats (Number 109), the decor of their houses (Number 358), the names of their streets (Number 510), and a thousand other details which would be unbearably tedious to name but together form a glowing, vivacious picture of the London which opened its arms to embrace the *Spectator*.

The wealth of such detail is endless, but it is just the beginning of the subject-matter. Natural science, classical learning, theater, books, philosophy, religion, art and music--these and many other subjects comprise the learning which the *Spectator* brought out of schools and colleges, "to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses" (Number 10). It was "a successful blending of amusement with agreeable and not too heavy learning" (Bond, xxxviii). Quotations from Milton, the Bible, Cicero and Seneca, generously
sprinkled throughout the *Spectator*, give it an infusion of culture and a tone of seriousness which was especially appealing to the rising generation of middle-class readers whose names mainly occupied Mr. Spectator’s list of subscribers (Bond, xciv). The variety of subject-matter in the new paper and the freshness of its treatment make it easy to understand why the *Spectator* was such a tremendous success in its day and why it continued to be read throughout the century (Bond lxiii).

The final issue of the *Spectator*, published on December 6, 1712, and bearing the motto from Persius *Respue quod non es*—lay the fictitious character aside—revealed to the world the identity of the authors of the *Spectator*. The "little joke on London" (Haluska) had come to a close, signed at last by Richard Steele.

Steele died on September 1, 1729, a poor man in Wales (Tillotson, 293), but the legacy he left behind is very rich. Certainly his work, combined with the equally prestigious work of his friend Addison, has rightly earned the praise critics have given it since the first issue of his famous *Spectator* appeared in London’s coffee-houses. Johnson pays the following tribute to this imaginative and vivacious periodical of the eighteenth century:

No greater felicity can genius attain than that of having purified intellectual pleasure, separated mirth from indecency, and wit from licentiousness; of having taught a succession of writers to bring elegance and gaiety to the aid of goodness; and, If I may use expressions yet more awful, of having turned many to righteousness" (Qtd in Bond xcvi).
Bond places Addison and Steele in the highest possible company of quality: "The Bible, Locke, and Mr. Spectator--there must have been many young men of the time who found this triad a source of strength in becoming more virtuous and more agreeable members of society" (lxxxvi).

No literary form could have this kind of effect but Horatian satire. If society is to be instructed, there must be an instructor, but if the society is to listen, they must not be threatened. In the Spectator, Richard Steele became just the harmless observer who could provide London society with the censor they so badly needed. By using the techniques of Horace, Steele found a way to reach the minds of his fellow-men, gently pointing out their faults and mocking them into virtue.

As a Horatian satirist, Steele hid behind fictitious characters, taking on a bantering, comical tone with which to trick his readers into being instructed by first entertaining them, then forcing them to look seriously at the issue at hand. For subject matter, he drew from real aspects of their lives to which they could relate. He held his reader's attention by making himself both personable and mysterious, keeping them guessing about his identity for nearly two years. London loved him for it, and so can we.
WORKS CITED


