



Parody of the epic tradition in the horatian satire (Satire 2.5)

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to indicate the way through which the satirical *persona* of Horace uses the model of the epic Homeric hero in the frame of the roman satire, in order to present the human behaviour in classical Rome and blame indirectly at the same time the institution of legacy-hunting that prevailed at that time.

KEY-WORDS: Horace, satire, parody, epic style, legacy-hunting

The epic as a poetry of high style is often parodied by the comedians as well as the satirists. Not only in Aristophanes, but also in Varron, Plautus and Lucilius, we can meet a lot of similar examples before the poems of Horace. And in the last one, however, the traces of parody of the epic poetry are already significant from the first book of his *Satires* (Satires 1.5 and 1.7). Moreover, the author himself focuses evidently on the fact that he could never write epic poetry and that he was born in order to write satires (Satires 1.10 and 2.1), which are more familiar to his personality. The 2.5, nevertheless, is the only one from the poems of this collection that focuses on this tendency of the satirist to laugh against another literary type.

More precisely, in the satire 2.5, the central subject is the legacy-hunting (*klirothiria*), which was a tendency of many people to attach themselves parasitically to rich people and old men without inheritors, hoping that they will render them heirs in their will. Horace wishes to satirize here this phenomenon, which was usual at the times of the *res publica*, as Petronius will also do later in his *Satyricon*. At the same time, he satirizes the pattern of descent in Hades, playing with the tendency of the epic poetry to present a lot of different versions of a common subject.

In 2.5, Horace substantially continues the discussion in Hades that Homer describes in the 11th rhapsody of *Odyssey* between Odysseus and Teiresias. The prophet foresees that the first will return in Ithaca when Odysseus asks for the advice of the old man concerning how he will recover his fortune (verses 1-10):

'Hoc quoque, Tiresia, praeter narrata petenti
 responde, quibus amissas reparare queam res
 artibus atque modis. quid rides?' 'iamne doloso
 non satis est Ithacam revehi patriosque penatis
 adspicere?' 'o nulli quicquam mentite, vides ut 5
 nudus inopsque domum redeam te vate, neque illic
 aut apotheca procis intacta est aut pecus: atqui
 et genus et virtus, nisi cum re, vilior alga est.'
 quando pauperiem missis ambagibus horres,
 accipe qua ratione queas ditescere.

Teiresias answers that the only solution in order to escape from poverty is the legacy-hunting and suggests that he uses various methods by which he could achieve his objective, as well as certain forms of flattery that will ensure the entrapment and the deceit of the victim on behalf of the *captator* (verses 45-50):

sicui praeterea validus male filius in re
 praeclara sublatus aletur, ne manifestum

caelibis obsequium nudet te, leniter in spem
adrepe officiosus, ut et scribare secundus
heres et, siquis casus puerum egerit Orco,
in vacuum venias: perraro haec alea fallit.

The 2.5 also constitutes the only satire of the second book of the collection in which Horace does not participate as an interlocutor in the dialogue, element that he chooses to use deliberately, so that it does not seem that the poet promotes or practises himself some kind of legacy-hunting. Consequently, he wishes to differentiate himself from anything said in the dialogue of the two heroes. Nevertheless, the satirical *persona* is present everywhere in the whole poem, although it does not participate in the dialogue. By selecting two familiar characters from the epic and the wider ancient greek poetry to the medium reader, Horace wishes to laugh against the epic style.¹

More precisely, in verse 3, the word *rides* is a basic term of the satire, with the difference that in the epic, the gods are the ones who laugh against the mortals and under no circumstances the heroes (*quid rides*). Not only Teiresias, but also Odysseus in the 2.5 use vocabulary that does not suit in the epic, but in satirical heroes, such as in verses 75-83, where in the frame of satire we can see the prophet reversing the traditional epic model of devotion of each woman to her husband, a model which Penelope incarnates in this case:

scortator erit: cave te roget? ultro
Penelopam facilis potiori trade. "putasne
perduci poterit tam frugi tamque pudica,
quam nequiere proci recto depellere cursu? '
'venit enim magnum donandi parca iuventus
nec tantum veneris quantum studiosa culinae.
sic tibi Penelope frugi est? quae si semel uno
de sene gustarit tecum partita lucellum,

¹ Muecke (1993) 179.

ut canis a corio numquam absterrebitur uncto.

Teiresias justifies the devotion of Penelope to her husband from the fact that her fiancées did never offer to her any powerful gifts in order to seduce her so as to forget Odysseus; on the contrary, they were interested only in material goods and taking her fortune. Consequently, in this case, we can see a person of the epic tradition, that is to say Penelope, acquiring different motives for her transactions from which the reader already knows from Homer; a woman may betray her old spouse instead and conspire against him if she receives the suitable gifts, in order to seize his fortune.²

Moreover, the prophet actually presents himself as a successor of Catius in the 2.4, with the difference that he will teach *ratio*, not the art of cooking in his interlocutor. Substantially, Catius, let alone Teiresias, are presented as schoolteachers of their art, gastronomy on the one hand and the *ars captatoria* on the other hand,³ with the difference that the first *persona* of the poet is an epicurean philosopher, who believes that he has global knowledge and as a result, he uses specialised vocabulary in order to express his arguments, while the second one is a person well-known in everyone from the homeric epic. With its particular humour, the *persona* of Horace ridicules moreover in the 2.5 the divinatory utterances of Pythia and the divine oracles, which play a catalytic role in Homer (verses 59-60):

Laertiade, quidquid dicam, aut erit aut non:
divinare etenim magnus mihi donat Apollo.

Substantially, in this particular satire, according to Michael Roberts in his article titled “Horace, Satires 2.5: Restrained indignation” the *persona* of Horace wishes to deprecate the corruptness of his modern Rome.⁴ The choice of the epic hero, such as Odysseus, as a recipient of directions from Teiresias, shows an alteration of values of that times through the comparison between the Greek heroic

² Muecke (1993) 190.

³ Muecke (1993) 179.

⁴ Roberts (1984) 432.

legend and the corrupted Rome of that period. This perversion finds application to the ideal of friendship, central theme of the horatian satire, since in the 2.5 it seems that in many cases friendship is not reciprocal and pure, such as the relationship between the poet and Maecenas, but is often based on the profit and the client services among men.⁵

However, the particular opinion of Roberts concerning the social dimension of this satire was revised again in the frame of examining Odysseus through the prism of roman ideology of the times of the *res publica*. Odysseus is finally the suitable person in order to be taught the art of *captatio* in the satire, because he is founded in the precedent literature as a model of intelligence and shiftiness (*dolos*), which the poet can use in a masterly way in the case of comedy.⁶ In the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, the hero also reverses the established homeric model. Ajax symbolizes the adherence to the traditional epic poetry, while Odysseus begins from that, but soon he reverses it and adapts himself in the image which derives from the ovidian tradition. He equally represents the medium educated reader of the times of August, who does not examine superficially the important Homeric model, on the contrary, he is able to distinguish his multidimensional nature and his multiple interpretations.⁷ Furthermore, Odysseus reflects in the roman epic the force of reason and persuasion, while Ajax reflects the force of work, known mostly from his devotion to traditional values.⁸

Consequently, Horace here chooses Odysseus masterfully, since in the 2.5 he reverses the traditionally epic patterns and adapts them in the frame of satire, because in the literature of the *res publica* Odysseus is far from the greek tradition. Moreover, as a symbol of persuasion, it is legitimate to take advice from Teiresias

⁵ For the different types of *amicitia* in ancient Rome, cf. Scall (1996), Maguiness (1938), Konstan (1995).

⁶ Muecke (1993) 177. For further details, cf. Oliensis (1998), Plaza (2006), Freudenburg (1993), Hooley (2007). The Satire 2.5 has also a philosophical background, as well as the whole collection and the character of Odysseus reflects to the poetry of Philodemus. For further details, cf. Kemp (2010), Tsouna (2008).

⁷ Papaioannou (2007) 178.

⁸ For more information in regard to the role of Odysseus in the frame of the ovidian roman epic, specifically in the scene of the judgment of arms between Ajax and Odysseus, cf. Papaioannou (2007), as well as Stanford (1954).

concerning how he may flatter an old person and convince him with his arguments to render his heir. Finally, the double dimension of Odysseus (epic and anti-epic simultaneously) ensures the ambiguity of this particular poem. In the entire 2.5 an ironic game exists between the heroic status of the characters and the perversion of human values, that is eventually provoked by the institution of legacy-hunting.⁹

As a result, what we can deduce is that the poet here masterfully uses a physiognomy as famous as Odysseus in the frame of satire, in order to refer to the perversion of moral values of his times. Behind this *persona* of the hero, it is hidden the poet himself and more generally each brilliant Roman man of the times of Horace, who is neither attached in anything traditionally established, nor is he taking into consideration the morally correct, but nevertheless, he is clever, adapts himself quickly to the social conditions and is being corrupted easily. He acts with all the faults which Horace already criticizes in his previous satires, such as the *invidia* (jealousy) and the *avaritia* (avarice) and not with the *mediocritas* (modesty) that is presented as the most important moral value in the beginning of the first book of the horatian Satires. I believe, in other words, that not only Teiresias, but also Odysseus are *personae* of the author that express the perceptions of the citizens of his modern Rome, who do not live prudently, but seek to increase their wealth by any means. They are consequently the people who need the teachings of satire, so that they learn that the prudent, the modest and not the luxurious way of life will lead them to the real happiness.

Furthermore, the role of Teiresias is corresponding to the one of the *doctores inepti* who constitute the basic speakers of the second book of the *Satires*. The satirical subject presents the prophet as notorious, but he never blames or criticizes him for anything; on the contrary, he remains silent, leading his hero to his condemnation by the furious reader (*indignatio* that we also meet later in the poetry of Juvenile), through the arguments of Teiresias that express a cynic way of behaving (verses 73-76):¹⁰

adiuvat hoc quoque, sed vincit longe prius ipsum

⁹ Muecke (1993) 178.

¹⁰ Roberts (1984) 433.

expugnare caput. scribet mala carmina vecors:
laudato. scortator erit: cave te roget; ultro 75
Penelopam facilis potiori trade.'

Besides, this tendency of the poet to criticize straightly people and situations, even if they are imaginary, is founded as a fundamental element of the horatian writing that we can see furthermore in his previous satires (mainly in the 1.5 and the 1.7-1.9).

The *captatio* is in general a negative side of *amicitia*, which the satirist chooses in order to be presented as a means of perversion of moral values in his times that is based on greed and avarice, two faults that Horace criticizes negatively already from the start of his *Satires* (Satires 1.1-1.3). The flattery is the basic tool of the *immolator*, so that he can fool his victims, element that also prevails in the parasite character of comedies, who survives by taking advantage of his friends in order to obtain all the material goods he desires; such an example is presented in the *Flatterer* of Menander (*Colax*) in order to appear later in the *fabula palliata*, with the very significant example of the *Eunuchus* of Terence.

In *Eunuchus*, the parasite is named Gnathon (Jawbones), and is the person who is always attached to his master and flatters him permanently, so that he gains as much food as possible. Terence admits in the preface of the same comedy that this type of flatterer, in combination to the character of the boastful soldier (*Miles Gloriosus*), is used in his works as a model taken from the *Flatterer* of Menander. He adds, however, that he did not know that Plautus and Naevius wrote comedies with the same title and in this way he answers consequently in his decriers, who accused him of *contaminatio*;¹¹ at the same time, he underlines equally in the public that he did never want to deceive his audience, on the contrary, he did not know that his two predecessors had transferred that particular Greek comedy of Menander in the Latin language (verses 25-34):

Colacem esse Naevi, et Plauti veterem fabulam;

¹¹ According to the rules of composition concerning the *fabula palliata*, a Roman dramatist did a *contaminatio* in case he decided to use elements of plot from two different Greek comedies, which had not been translated by anyone before him in the Latin language. For more information concerning the *contaminatio* in the comedies of Terence, cf. Sharrock (2009) 86-87.

parasiti personam inde ablatam et militis.

si id est peccatum, peccatum imprudentiast poetae,

non quo furtum facere studuerit.

id ita esse vos iam iudicare poteritis.

Colax Menandrist: in east parasitus Colax et miles gloriosus:

eas se non negat personas transtulisse in Eunuchum suam

ex Graeca; sed eas fabulas factas prius

Latinas scisse sese id vero pernegat.

To sum up, in the satire 2.5, Horace seems to be absent completely from the dialogue that is developed between Teiresias and Odysseus, because he does not wish to express directly his opinion about the legacy-hunting. This “silent” satirical *persona* can remind us of the poems 1.5 and 1.7-1.9, nevertheless, it is present everywhere in the 2.5 through the way that he presents his heroes, who lose their epic character and get a different one, appropriate to the goals of the horatian poetry. The poet, on the one side, wishes, as it is common in the type of poetry that he writes, to laugh against another and different kind of poetry that is famous for his high style- that is to say the epic- and on the other side he expresses his reflections on the perversion of many fundamental moral values, such as the *amicitia* of his times, which had been caused by the human tendency to succumb to some of the most common human faults, like greed and avarice.

In conclusion, Horace wishes here to present himself as a teacher for his readers so as to improve their way of life, as in the previous poems of the collection, and as a result he criticizes morbid social behaviours concerning the daily life of his times; the satire 2.5, consequently, summarizes patterns that we met in the previous poems of the *Satires* which present the poet for another time as an educator- although he is absent here from the dialogue- who aims to consult his reader for the important values of a moral life that is based on friendships similar to that between the author and Maecenas- by using a dialogue between two epic heroes, who become in the end unlikeable to the reader because of the perceptions that they express throughout the poem.

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