

WRITING AND POWER. PROPAGATING IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY IN HORACE'S SERMONES

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to treat the subject of powerful and influential literature in Horace's Sermones. In Rome's siecle d'or literature was used as a tool of imperial propaganda, being highly politically engaged, as it can be noticed in the literary circle of Maecenas. Two expressions of power describe Latin literature: power over texts (literary circles) and power exercised by means of literary use (manipulation, persuasion and influencing). The target audience of this literature was represented by the elite classes, voting classes and a restricted group who can operate with the encoded information hidden in the allusion of the text, as it can be observed in the case of Horace's satires. Humour is used by Horace in order to implement some imperial ideas, considering satire a smooth path to the audience's heart. Analysing these two books of satires it can be observed that they are an expression of rhetorical persuasio. The satires not only reject, but they want to convince that certain ideas and actions are foolish and vicious. Horace's satires not only reject, but they want to convince that certain ideas or actions are foolish and vicious. The satiric complexity relies in the hidden message of a literary work (allusion, metaphoric discourse, intertextuality), an ideological wire that encompasses in its scope an understanding of social and political vision.

Keywords: satire, power, persuasion, audience, ideological wire

The satiric frame of mind, of which (someone/something) is an emblem, comprises complex and paradoxical qualities. Distinguishing itself from the other forms of power, throughout which we detect force, manipulation, authority, and persuasions, satire uses persuasive techniques in order to achieve its goals. A persuasive manifestation of power form refers to any influence means such as arguments, appeals or exhortations whereby the writer gains compliance of the followers, also protecting the freedom of the follower in order to exercise moral and political responsibilities. In this particular case, we detect the satire of Horace as a manipulative form of expressing socio-political ideas in the advantage of Octavian and Maecenas, as previously Lucilius was exploited for propaganda purposes by the Republican cause and Pompeians in extension.

The satirist is an observer of humanity and an irate attacker of particular vices and individuals. In consequence, the study of satire defines two main dimensions: the ironic perspective on the socio-historical subject and the parodic borrowing from literature. His method of observation and attack is the versified satire. Satire becomes specific, even when it uses allusive methods and the true subject of satire isn't the object of criticism, as we can observe in the fifth satire of the first book of *Sermones* where the purpose is revealed gradually. Speaking about Lucilius and his uncensored and bitter type of discourse:

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae
Atque aii, quorum comoedia prisca virorum est,
Siquis erat dignus describe, quod malus ac fur,
Quod moechus fore taut sicarius aut alioqui
Famosus, multa cum libertate notabant.
Hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus,
Mutatis tantum pedibus numerique, facetus,
Emunctae naris, durus componere versus. (Horace, Sermones I. IV:1-8),

Horace recognizes the true intention of his satire, as it can be observed in the fourth satire where the moral reform is set as the purpose of his attack:

(...) Quod vitium procul afore chartis

Atque animo prius, ut siquid promittere de me

Possum aliud vere, promitto. Liberius si

Dixero quid, si forte iocosius, hoc mihi iuris

Cum venia dabis: insuevit pater optimus hoc me

Ut fugerem exemplis vitiorum quaeque notando.

Cum me hortaretur, parce frugaliter atque viverem uti contentus eo, quod mi ipse paresset (Horace, *Sermones* I. IV:101-108)

In this order of ideas, Lucilius *libertas*¹ is a shield used by Horace to justify his own satirical speech, a type of discourse about he states that is not very admired and approved, mainly because it reveals some truths about public individuals, but to evaluate the style of a public speaker involves a high level of personal taste:

(...) Beatus Fannius ultro

Delatis capsis et imagine, cum mea nemo

Scripta legat vulgo recitare timentis ob hanc rem,

Quod sunt quos genus hoc minime iuvat, utpote plures

Culpari dignos (Horace, *Sermones* I. IV: 21-25)

Given the indirection of satire, it seems appropriate to look closer to the political context as well as the author's method of propagating certain imperial ideologies. Two expressions of power and influence describe Horatian satire: power over texts (literary circles) and power exercised by means of literary use (manipulation, persuasion and influencing). Literary circles were in a close relationship with the political affairs, as it was observed by I.M. Le M. DuQuensnay:

“His technique is both less direct and more positive. His basic strategy is to present an attractive image of himself and his friends as sophisticated, cultured and intelligent men who are humane in their attitudes to others and mindful of the *mos maiorum*. Above all he exhibits a concern with moral issues. But for the contemporaries of Sallust the distinction between morality and politics was not a meaningful one” (I.M. Le M. DuQuensnay, *Horace and Maecenas: The propaganda Value of Sermones I*, p. 43)².

Maecenas' literary circle served Octavian's new policies and is no reason to think otherwise, mainly because all Horatian satires were written between the years 38 and 36/35, more precisely since their *amicitia* began and since the satires were published. This period of time is marking also the second Triumvirate – the *Bellum Siculum*, stressing the potential of the satires as propaganda. Their relationship began as a professional one, were the role of *amici*, expressed in terms of writings, was rewarded with *pecunia* and *honores*. Maecenas started recruiting poets since 38 (along with Virgil and Varius Rufus) and Horace served him, crossing the limits of patronage and becoming more of an *amicus* and *conuictor*. Throughout this friendship, Horace became a public person being able to make public statements³. In the first step, he dedicates the *Sermones* to Maecenas, admitting that these satires are in accordance with Maecenas' point of view:

Plotius et Varius, Maecenas Vergiliusque,

¹ While debating the problematic of Lucilian influence over Horatian satires, Dustin Griffin correctly states: “In defending himself Horace makes opportunistic use of his predecessors to make the best case for his own practice: Lucilius was outspoken before me; so were the writers of Old Comedy, who censured fools <<multa cum libertate>> (*Satire* 1:4.5)” (Dustin Griffin, *Satire. A critical reintroduction*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1994, p.7).

² I.M. Le M. DuQuensnay, *Horace and Maecenas: The propaganda Value of Sermones I*, in Kirk Freudenburg (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Horace: Satires and Epistles*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 43.

³ Horace's second *Epistle* reveals the fact that poetry brought him wealth (Horace, *Epistles*, II.2). By revealing and publically accepting this benefactor relationship, Horace underlines the fact that there is nothing unusual or dishonourable in it.

Valgius et probet haec Octavius optimus atque
Fuscus et haec utinam Viscorum laudet uterque!
Ambitione relegate te dicere possum,
Pollio, te, Messalla, tuo cum frater, simulque
Vos, Bibule et Servi, simul his te, candide Furni,
Complures alios, doctos ego quos et amicos
Prudens praetero; quibus haec, sint qualiacumque,
Arridere velim, doliturus, si placeant spe
Deterius nostra. (Horatius, *Sermones*, I.X:81-90).

Encouraging audience to interpret ``the poems as the work of an *amicus* of Maecenas and so invites them to draw what inferences they can about himself and his friends`` (I.M Le M. DuQuensnay, *Horace and Maecenas: The propaganda Value of Sermones I*, p. 53). This method of invoking someone else's power in order to gain your own describes an apart way of persuasive rhetoric. Along with this public and political association, another fine connection is intended and suggested: the one with the appreciated predecessors. Lucilius is set as Horace's model, in which he sees not only the pillar of Roman satire, but a reputed author with high literary achievements. Throughout this association, Horace (Horace, *Sermones*, I.X:1-6) is suggesting that he is not only the friend of Maecenas, but the contemporaneous equivalent of Lucilius, the poet who was the voice of the Republican *libertas*.

Satire as *persuasio* confirms that a poem wasn't considered a naïve expression of a poet's feelings into the Roman world, but it was a powerful tool used in propagandistic purposes. The satires were highly contextualized and conditioned by audience's expectations, as David Hooley states: ``Yet within that range of expectations a poet had enormous liberty to consider and express ideas through generic structures; in fact those structures became the means whereby poets said things`` (David Hooley, *Roman satire*, p.33)⁴. Who was this audience is one of the main questions that arise. In an extended appreciation, all the educated individuals will have access to literature, but only the ones who have the right to vote and manifest influential attitude publically will matter. Unobtrusively, Horace addresses to powerful men that are capable of sustaining or changing a political affair⁵, in more specific terms, he sustains the new Principate of Octavian.

The persuasive technique is constructed and revealed gradually, for the reader not to feel shocked and overwhelmed by the novelty of Octavian's regime. Horace starts accordingly with a direct and detailed poetical image of the Republican regime, as it can be seen the short satire from book I, which describes the incident in Brutus' camp in Asia (43/42 B.C.):

Proscripti Regis Rupili pus atque venenum
Hybrid quo pacto sit Prsius ultius, opinor
Omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus esse.
Persius his permagna negotia dives habebat
Clazomenis, etiam lites cum Rege molestas,
Durus humo atque odio qui posset vincere Regem,
Confidens tumidus, adeo sermonis amari,
Sisennas, Barros ut equis praecurreret albis.`` (Horace, *Sermones* I.VII:1-8)

The link between the Republican Rome and the new Principate is set by the concept of *libertas*. Examples of *libertas* are set in language too, as it was previously argued in the case of Lucilius' imitation. A comparison can be made in the following cases⁶:

⁴ David Hooley, *Roman satire*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, 2007, p. 33.

⁵ By Horace's admission into Maecenas circle, he becomes part of the new political regime sustained by Octavian Augustus.

⁶ More examples are given by I.M Le M. DuQuensnay, *Horace and Maecenas: The propaganda Value of Sermones I*, in Kirk Freudenburg (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Horace: Satires and Epistles*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 69. Some other strong worlds were avoided by Horace, mainly

"Nam si tu fluctus undasque e gurgite **salso**

Tollere decreris, venti prius Emathii vim,
ventum, inquam, tollas t. c. q. i.1." (Lucilius, I:45)

Nonius, 285, 5 : '**Durus**,' nocens ... — et saevo ac duro in bello multo optimus liostis. (Lucilius, XXX:1124)

and

*Tum Praenestinus **salso** multoque fluenti*

*Expressa arbusto regerit convicia, **durus***

Vindemiator et invictus, cui saepe viator

Cessisset magna compellans voce cuculum (Horace, *Sermones*, I.VII:28-31),

where the language similitudes between Horatius and Lucilius can be easily observed. More far for a modern reader are the messages hidden in personal names, how it can be observed in the second satire from the first book: *Villius in Fausta Sullae gener, hoc miser uno/ nomine deceptus, poenas dedit usque superque/ quam satis est* (Horace, *Sermones*, I.II:64-66). The persons which Horace talks about it would have been very easy to identify for a Roman reader, as N. Rudd affirms: "A Roman reader would have known that Sulla was Sulla the Happy (Felix) and that his daughter was called Joy. So language conspires with love to deceive the wretched Villius" (N. Rudd, 1966, p. 146). We may add that this direct and personal address is used by Horace as an evasive attack, meant not only to denigrate and reveal facts about a public figure, but to point out vices.

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because they were of Greek origin (i.e. *ballista*, *catapulta*, *androgyni*, *cercopithecus* etc.). These language borrowings in terms of insult are largely debated by Niall Rudd, *The satires of Horace*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1966, p. 111-115.