

## SATIRE AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CONTROL IN ANCIENT ROMAN CULTURE. LUCILIUS AND HORACE

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*Abstract: The aim of the present article is to demonstrate that ancient Roman satire had the power to manipulate and influence public opinion. Satire's level of influence concerned the leading figures of Rome since the Republican times in such a high level that it became a socio-political tool in the process of influencing the electors. By making the shameful laughable and by describing socio-political conflicts, satire had the role of an agent control. This article focuses on the satires wrote by Lucilius, in the Roman Republican time, and Horace, in the time of Augustus' Empire. The moral, social, cultural, and political problems are all debated in the satire, making it a complex genre with many levels of influence. The relationship between the genre of satire and *lex per saturam lata*, a law which contained distinct regulation at once, can demonstrate satire's multipurpose content. This flexibility and multiuse of satire in times of ancient Rome underlines the power that resides in invective and lampooning. The power and efficacy of satire resides in the fact that it has, by means of laugh and lampoon, the capacity to promote, propagate, sustain or denigrate certain socio-political amendments. In consequence, this article seeks to demonstrate that satire represented a powerful tool in the hands of Roman leading classes, while the author had the position of a socio-cultural influencer.*

*Keywords: satire, law, invective, lampoon, influencer*

The relationship of poetry to the state and politics represents a delicate matter, while satire in concentrating on morals and ethics. Different spheres of Roman culture and politics are recalled in the whole process for the satirist to gain acceptance and convince. While trying to persuade the general opinion, satire reflects the system of relationships that governs a culture. This system of relationships is described by political, economic, and legal aspects. By these means it has access to power and, consequently, it has legal retribution, as Robert C. Elliott is affirming: "We know that Horace in his gingerly consciousness of the delicate line he had to draw was justifiably worried over legal retribution" (Robert C. Elliott, *The power of satire. Magic, ritual, art*: 261)<sup>1</sup>. In the same order of ideas we may state that satire implies both the quality of a citizen and of a writer in the big spectrum of literature and history. By critiquing the society in which he lives, the satirist complains and objects to the legal topics: failures of law (implies the problems of society), legal control or means of displaying power in the public domain<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the public status of a literary text, here in the case of *satura*, I can start its analyzation by reflecting on genre's name, as a first details of a wider hermeneutical process. The origin of the name's genre, *satura*, has numerous and various explanations, but due to the fact that they don't serve to the disambiguation of article's purpose they were left aside. Consequently, without wanting to reiterate the theories that are seeking to evoke the origin of

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<sup>1</sup>Robert C. Elliott, *The power of satire. Magic, ritual, art*, Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970.

<sup>2</sup>In this respect, three satires are emphasizing the subject: Juvenal's 13<sup>th</sup> Satire, Horace, *Sermones*, 2.1. and Lucian's *Dialogue of the Dead*.

the ancient satire, I may relate my article to the connection that it is made between Roman *satira* and *lex per Saturnam*. I am intending to demonstrate, by using the examples of Lucilius and Horace, that satire was in a strong relation with the law since it's very beginning. In the context of early Roman society the complexity of lampoon and invective was indicated by its relation with law. In that manner, abusive attacks were made and considered as a injurious act on a person's reputation. This action was condemned by the Twelve Tables<sup>3</sup>:

1.a. – Whoever enchants by singing an evil incantation ...

1.b. - ... If anyone sings or composes an incantation that can cause dishonour or disgrace to another ... he shall suffer a capital penalty.``(Table VIII, 1a-b)<sup>4</sup>

The reason that stays beyond the law must be in accordance with the effect of a public manifested judgment (written or spoken). Roman law prohibited *mala carmina*, abusive and defamatory poems, among which we can recall satire, because we can find in its verses an intention to ridicule and bite an opponent.

The satiric discourse urges to denounce evil, without hesitating to proclaim that this irrational feeling (as the stoics said) makes others feel good, beginning with the author and continuing with the ones that are joining him in thinking. In other words, we may say that the satirist wants to denounce evil throughout evil, covering it with the shape of moral and ethical sense of justice. By this denunciation, the writer gets to be set among those who are public personas and are capable of influencing opinions and mentalities. Gaining the role of an influencer, the satirist works and actions are under the power of law, meaning that he must be in accordance with state's rules. In order not to be put under silence by legal punishment or by exile, a satirist is recommended to be in accordance to a powerful politician. This is probably the way in which a satirist adheres to a literary circle. My thesis here is that a Roman satirist could not be against the most powerful men without having the support of another. In other words, it becomes a fight of power by means of literature's influencing tools. Following the same path, it can be stated that a satirist has a bivalent role and position into the society of ancient Rome<sup>5</sup>: the attacker and the defender.

The two paradoxical position of the satirist: attacker and defender are to be seen in the same satirical discourse. Lucilius, and later on Horace, had used rhetorical techniques<sup>6</sup> having in mind a similar scope: to promote the policies of one person and create him an appreciable image. Comparison was constructed by the axiom good-bad, as were the political discourses produced, in order to create a favourable image. In the following example, Agrippa and Atride are described indirectly in opposition with the new rule of Octavian:

Scilicet ut plausus, quos fert Agrippa, feras tu,  
Astuta ingenium vulpes imitata leonem ?  
-Ne quis humasse velit Aiace, Atrida, vetas cur ?  
-Rex sum – Nil ultra quaero plebeius – Et aequam  
Rem imperito ; ac sicui videor non iustus, inulto  
Dicere, quod sentit, permitto – Maxime regum,

<sup>3</sup> This legal code had been framed since the beginning of the fifth century B.C. Cicero in *De Republica* (IV.12), Festus (196.12), and St. Augustin, quoting Cicero, in *City of God and Christian Doctrine* (II.9), are speaking about the those laws that impose the death penalty, in every case is mentioned the 8<sup>th</sup> Table, 1a-b. A similar law existed in Athens, but the Greek references are unsatisfactory in order to make a comparison (it is mentioned by Varro, and Horace, *Epistles*, II.1:152-5)

<sup>4</sup> The quotations from The Twelve Tables and from Lucilius' works are given from Loeb edition: Page, E.T., Capps, E., Rouse, D.H.W., (eds.), *Remains of Old Latin*. III. Lucilius. The Twelve Tables, London/Cambridge, Massachusetts: William Heinemann Ltd/ Harvard University Press, 1938.

<sup>5</sup> When making this statement I am referring to the satirical work of Lucilius, Horace, Persius, Juvenal, Petronius, Varro, and Lucian.

<sup>6</sup> Lucilius refuses the fantastic element of literature, considering truth a major issue that could not be left aside. In this respect, he describes the quotidian life, where the main themes are the political life (a fight where everyone has an adversary), moral and ethical aspects of life etc.

Di tibi dent capta classem reducere Troia (Horace, *Sermones*, II, III: 185-191)<sup>7</sup>

A similarity, in means and intentions, can be made between the campaigns organized by the consul Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus against Tiberius, and the attack of the writer Lucilius against the same Metellus Macedonicus. Both were building up a discourse in order to gain popularity for themselves, as in the case of Metellus Macedonicus, or for a friend, as in the case of Lucilius, who was attacking in order to please Scipio Aemilianus. It is worth noting that they were usually at odds with each other and they were trying to denunciate the actions of the opponent. Plutarch is writing about a speech of Metellus Macedonicus against Tiberius Gracchus (Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 14.2), and also does Cicero (Cicero, *Brutus*, 81; Cicero, *De amicitia*, 41), fact which proves the notoriety<sup>8</sup> gained by consul's discourse in the political fight between the two of them<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, Cicero mentions that Metellus Macedonicus was the leader of the *obstractores et invidi Scipionis* (Cicero, *Republica*, I.31), but he respected his image and took care of his funeral, ordering his sons to transport the corpse to the crematory pyre. Due to the political rivalry, Lucilius, as a close friend of Scipio, attacked Metellus Macedonicus. The censor's stern admonitions on the importance of marriage and raising children should have disturbed Scipio Aemilianus, who failed to have an exemplary family, and Lucilius felt that he could use Metellus discourse against him: "Men provide this irksomeness and hardship for themselves of their own accord – they get wives for beget children, so that for their sake they may do all this that I've said" (Lucilius, XXVI: 644-645) and following "Delirare means to depart from the straight line ... - Wherefore do I go off the rails and do the duty of a man eager for children." (Lucilius, XXVI: 646). Metellus discourse on the necessity of having a family in order to be a good man and an exemplary citizen is reduced by Lucilius to an opportunistic intention: man has a wife in order to have children. In this sharp and wicked statement, the satirist is underlining the opportunistic view of some influential Romans' life, indirectly to the remark made by Metellus Macedonicus, considering that it is not mandatory to have a wife if you have it only to expand the family and give heirs. The general tone is given by the subject *homines*, where the allusiveness could be easily tracked by the contemporaneous audience (as is to be seen by the notoriety gained by Metellus Marcellus speech). But why is this lampoon not directly addressed? Two justifications can still be found: the satirist doesn't want to fall under the incidence of the law by being accused of denigrating the consul's public image (*Lex XII Tabularum*, Table VIII, 1a-b) and, in the same time, he intend to persuade and influence the public opinion by suggesting (through this subversive statement) that man doesn't have to have a family in order to be a complete and reliable Roman citizen. Consequently, we may imply that Lucilius' aim is to protect and create an appreciable public image of Scipio Aemilianus. In this manner, the topical subject gets to be a universal one and the indirect attack on the Roman consul Metellus Macedonicus could be turned into a socio-ethical matter regarding the civil status of a person. The necessity of having a wife, a family in extension, becomes an ethical issue that needs no to be corrected by means of laughter<sup>10</sup>. Considering that merits and achievements were in a high need of public recognition, as Harriet I. Flower is also stating:

<sup>7</sup> The quotations from Horace works are given from the following bilingual edition: Horatius, *Opera Omnia*, 2 vol, Ediție Critică, ediție îngrijită, studio introductiv, note și indici Mihai Nichita, București: Editura Univers, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Metellus' speech to the senate was recited by Octavian Augustus almost a century later (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 89.2; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, I.6.1-7).

<sup>9</sup> Around 139 BC, Metellus Macedonicus and Scipio Aemilianus had fallen out over some political issue, but their fight was only political and Metellus Macedonicus.

<sup>10</sup> Laughter is used in order to implement a way of thinking, mainly because its capacity of being captivating and popular.

“In typically Roman fashion, merit needed to be publicly recognized and the names of leaders needed to be made known to their fellow citizens. Spectacle and public self-representation were as important to the Roman officeholder as to any modern politician seeking election for himself or public support for his party.” (Harriet I. Flower, *Spectacle and political culture in the Roman Republic*:380)<sup>11</sup>

It is suggestive that the Roman political elite was regarded in terms of publicity or of its public profile. This public image was constructed in various ways, throughout which we can recall the spectacles that could have been displayed in forms of theatre or in public readings, as well in the religious manifestation (i.e. funerals and public celebrations). Hence, spectacle depicted the Roman life and the political power<sup>12</sup> in a way that was essentially didactic and influential for its citizens. The achievement of spectacle is sought also by satire, who was introduced into the Roman public life since the time of Republic<sup>13</sup>.

The satires written by Lucilius, friend of Scipio Aemilianus and a member of his intellectual circle, represents one of the first intentions to ridicule an opponent by means of versification. Personal reflections (ethical, cultural, and political) are transgressing the borders and become a public criticism meant to change opinions. One of the main techniques of *persuatio*<sup>14</sup> is to make the auditorium think that he is a privileged one (learned, educated, and exquisite):

“Cicero: Lucilius, a learned and witty man, used to say that he wished to be read neither by the very learned nor by the very unlearned, on the ground that the one kind would understand nothing of him, and the other kind would understand perhaps more than he did himself; of whom he went so far as to write” (Lucilius, XXVI:635)

On this ground, Lucilius` poems are foreshadowing Horatian satire, as Elaine Fantham was previously stating: “Lucilius` later hexameter satires mixed political invective with literary rhetorical parody” (Elaine Fantham, *Literature in the Roman Republic*: 333)<sup>15</sup>.

The *exemplum* of Lucilius was later indicated by Roman authors who were trying to justify the urge of freedom speech and a harsh language. Along with Horace, Seneca and Persius<sup>16</sup> were later on referring to the satires written by Lucilius. Paying respects to *mos maiorum* in a culture of spectacle expresses the need to defend and validate a judgement, ideology or a method of expressing an opinion. In the particular case of Horace, we tend to believe that the satirist is using the example of his predecessor, Lucilius, to justify his discursive technique in terms of lampooning and invective: *Fuerit Lucilius, inquam/ comis er urbanus, fuerit limatior idem,/ quam rudis et Graecis intacti carminis auctor/ quamque poetarum seniorum turba* (Horatius, *Sermones*, I.X.64-68) or

Quid? Cum est Lucilius  
 ausus primus in hunc operis componere carmina morem  
 detrahere et pellem, nitidus qua quisque per ora  
 cederet, introrsum turpis : num Laelius aut qui  
 duxit ab oppressa meritum Carthagine nomen (Horatius, *Sermones*, II. I: 62-66)

<sup>11</sup>Harriet I. Flower, *Spectacle and political culture in the Roman Republic*, p. 380 in Harriet I. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>12</sup><sup>12</sup> The political power is a part of the public spectacles because it has the power to restrict, by means similar to censorship.

<sup>13</sup> Cicero in his *Brutus* notes that poets like Ennius, Naevius and Livius Andronicus had the power to manipulate public opinion by using rhetorical and literary tools. For example, Ennius rewrote the Roman literary history by denigrating the achievements of its predecessors. With the same aim, he doesn't neglect politics and he celebrates Fabius Cunctator, Pyrrhus and Appius Claudius (ROL I, 183-200, 268-286; 360-364). In this comparative manner, he depicts a beneficial image of the present.

<sup>14</sup>Different modes of persuasion (such as *logos* and *pathos*) are used to describe and question the Roman society.

<sup>15</sup>Elaine Fantham, *Literature in the Roman Republic*, p. 333 in Harriet I. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>16</sup>*Exempli causa*: Seneca, *Epistle* 6; Persius, I.1-2.

Their aim is similar: to convince the audience (magistrates, *nobiles*, elite – voters and influential people in general) that their versified opinion is ethically and morally justified:

Non isto vivimus illic,  
 Quo tur ere, modo; domus hac nec purior ulla est  
 Nec magis his aliena malis; nil mi officit, inquam,  
 Ditor hic au test quia doctior; est locus uni  
 Cuique suus (Horace, *Sermones*, I. IX : 48-52)

Freedom of speech is pursued by the author mainly because satire opens up ethical and political questions, meaning to disturb and influence opinions. The effect sought by the writer is to promote certain socio-political ideas, extracted from the ideology to which he adheres (mainly by the literary circle: Scipio Aemilianus` circle in the case of Lucilius and Maecenas` in the case of Horatius). The right to freely express in the public domain would have put the satire out of the law`s incidence<sup>17</sup>, which it would not have been a desired action by the politicians. The reason can be easily deduced and it states in satire`s power to influence and conduct the public opinion in author`s desired direction, or else why have state`s assembly members thought it is important to control?

Printed words are usually suspicious and even fearful of dissent and Roman law prohibited abusive songs or poems since the days of the Roman decemvirate. Satire`s complication is the use of humour and invective, while humour influences persuasion and it can affect public opinion. As a blend of literary and political opportunity, personal circumstances, satire describes itself as an attempt to discredit an opponent (person or party), and as method to advance into a literary career. Horatius` case is relevant in this sense because he was devoted to Maecenas in order to gain literary recognition. In his first book of *Epistles* he writes that he can relate to Maecenas as patron, *rex und pater*, but now he is ready to give back his gifts, *donate reponere*, if it is necessary to preserve his freedom<sup>18</sup>. By making this written announcement, Horace, regardless of its longer intention, admits that his pen was bought.

Sociologists like Friederick E. Lumley and Charles R. Gruner<sup>19</sup> considered the problem of satire as a mean of social control and analysed its effective instrument into modern society. These types of researches help the study of ancient Roman world by giving a ground to interpret the sociological implication of a satire and its power to persuade. The role of a laughter-provoking statement (or stimuli) in persuasive discourse can be related to Horace`s political implication, where morality is a subsidiary mean, even though, is seems to be the primary auctorial intention. The verses of Horace`s second satire are relevant in this sense, because while they speak about the morality of a temperate, moderate<sup>20</sup>, and healthy life, they are describing Octavian Augustus` politics (*in medias res*):

Accipe nunc, victus tenuis quae quantaque magnum  
 Afferat. In primis valeas bene; nam variae res  
 Ut noceant homini, credas memor illius escae,  
 Quae simplex olim tibi sederit; at simul assis

<sup>17</sup> The old Roman laws against *mala carmina* are still in effect in Walpole` England, as we are informed from Pope`s *Epistle to Fortescue*.

<sup>18</sup> Horace, *Epistles*, I.7.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick E. Lumley, *Means of Social Control*, New York, 1925, p. 251-255; Charles R. Gruner, *Is wit to humor what Rhetoric is to Poetic?*, Central States Speech Journal, 16:1, Routledge, UK, 1965, p. 17-22; Charles R. Gruner, *An experimental study of satire as persuasion*, Speech Monographs, 32:2, Routledge, UK, 1965, p. 149-153; Charles R. Gruner, *A further experimental study of satire as persuasion*, Speech Monographs, 33:2, Routledge, UK, 1966, p. 184-185; Gary F. Pokorny, Charles R. Gruner, *An experimental study of the effect of satire used as support in a persuasive speech*, Western Speech, 33:3, Routledge, UK, 1969, p. 204-211.

<sup>20</sup> The same recommendation of moderate life is made in the sixth satire (Horace, *Sermones*, II. VI) and in the eight satire, where Nasidienus` dinner party exposes the vulgarity of a *nouveau riche* (Horace, *Sermones*, II. VIII).

Miscueris elixa, simul conchyliis turdis,  
Dulcia se in bilem vertent stomachoque tumultum  
Lenta ferret pituita. (Horace, *Sermones*, II. II: 70-76)

or :

Quare per divos oratus uterque Penates  
Tu cave ne minuas, tu ne maius facias id,  
Quod satis esses putat pater et natura corcet.  
Praeterea ne vos titillet gloria, iure  
Iurando abstringam ambo : uter aedilis fuerit  
Vestrum praetor, is instabilis et sacer esto. (Horace, *Sermones*, II. III : 176-181).

To conclude, I may affirm that regarding the public status of a satirist, his writings are considered a subversive and conservative method of publically propagating an ideology. Society's norms are simultaneously challenged and affirmed with the intention to influence public opinion, similar to the modern instruments of social control. Satire achieves arbitrary power in the social and political order, as Lucilius' writings were serving Scipio Aemilianus' politics and Horace's sermons are in accordance with Maecenas and Octavian Augustus' new sociological, political, and cultural ideology.

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