

Notes On Horatian Poetry

Heather White

Horace's *Sermones* belong to the genre *satira*. According to the ancients, *satire*¹ attacked the vices of men. Quintilian stated (X. 1. 93) that *satira quidem tota nostra est*. I would like to suggest that we should translate Quintilian's words as follows: "There is, indeed, all (*tota*²) our *satire*". Quintilian means that the Romans wrote much *satire*³.

Sat. I, 4, 39-42:

Primum ego me illorum, dederim quibus esse poetas,
excerpam numero: neque enim concludere versum
dixeris esse satis: neque, si qui scribat uti nos
sermoni propiora, putes hunc esse poetam.

In these lines, Horace discusses the nature of his *satires*. I would like to suggest that we should translate lines 41-42 as follows: "nor would you count any poet who writes, as I do, lines more akin to slander (*sermoni*⁴ *propiora*)." At Sat. 2,1,68 Horace refers to Lucilius' "slandorous verses" (*famosisque ... versibus*).

Sat. I, 4, 45-48:

Idcirco quidam Comoedia necne poema
esset quaesivere, quod acer spiritus ac vis
nec verbis nec rebus inest, nisi quod pede certo
differt sermoni, sermo merus.

Horace compares his *satires* with Comedy. I would like to suggest that we should translate as follows: "Hence some have questioned whether Comedy is or is not poetry, since its spirit is fierce (*acer spiritus*), and there is no power (*vis*) in its words or subject matter (*rebus*), and, save that it differs from slander in its fixed metre (*pede*⁵), it is pure slander (*sermo*⁶ *merus*).

¹ Cf. A. Palmer, *The Satires Of Horace*, London 1968, reprint, page VII.

² Cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 2, 34, 112 *totamque ... terram* ("all the earth").

³ *Satires* were written by Lucilius, Horace, Persius and Juvenal.

⁴ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *sermo* B, 3: "of slander, calumny".

⁵ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *pes* II, K: "A metrical foot".

Sat. 2, 6, 16-19:

Ergo ubi me in montes et in arcem ex urbe removal;
quid prius illustrem saturis Musa⁶que pedestri?
nec mala me ambitio perdit nec plumbeus Auster
autumnusque gravis, Libitinae quaestus acerbae.

Horace states that he leaves Rome in order to write. I would like to suggest that we should translate as follows: “to whom should I sooner give renown with my satires and my Muse (Musa⁶)? No wretched flattery for a prosaic man (pedestri) worries me”.

Epist. I, 3, 9-15:

Quid Titius, Romana brevi venturus in ora?
Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus,
fastidire lacus et rivos ausus apertos.
ut valet? ut meminit nostri? Fidibusne Latinis
Thebanos aptare modos studet auspice Musa,
an tragica desaevit et ampullatur in arte?
quid mihi Celsus agit?

Horace refers here to Titius and Celsus. I would like to suggest that we should translate lines 12-15 as follows: “What of Titius? Does he remember me? Does he try to fit Theban measures to the Latin lyre, or, under the favour of the tragic Muse (auspice Musa / an tragica), does he rage and declaim (*ampullatur*)? What is Celsus doing in art (*in arte*)?”

Epist. 2, 1, 250-251:

Nec sermones ego malle
repentis per humum quam res componere gestas.

Horace refers in this passage to his *Sermones*. I would like to suggest that *Sermones* means here “Slanders”. Horace’s personified⁷ “Slanders” are said to travel (*repentis*⁸) through the land (*per humum*⁹).

⁶ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *sermo* B, 3: “of slander, calumny”.

⁷ For the personification of poems cf. Gow’s note on Theocritus’ *Idyll* 16, line 6.

⁸ At Lucan 3, 458 towers are said to travel (*repsere*) from afar.

⁹ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *humus* II: “Transf., in gen., like *solum*, land, country, region”.

Ars Poetica 95-98:

Et tragicus plerumque dolet sermone pedestri
Telephus et Peleus, cum pauper et exsul uterque
proicit ampullas et sesquipedalia verba,
si curat cor spectantis tetigisse querella.

Horace argues that in Tragedy Telephus and Peleus often lament in order to touch the spectator's heart. I would like to suggest that *sermone pedestri*, in line 95, means "due to prosaic slander". Horace states that Telephus and Peleus often utter laments due to prosaic slander¹⁰, but they avoid bombast (*ampullas*) and long words (*sesquipedalian verba*).

C. I, 2, 25-28:

quem vocet divom populus ruentis
imperi rebus? prece qua fatigent
virgines sanctae minus audientem
carmina Vestam?

Nisbet- Hubbard¹¹ explained that Horace refers here to the Vestal Virgins. I would like to suggest that we should translate as follows: "With what entreaty shall the holy Maidens tire less (*fatigent ...minus*) Vesta, who listens to their prayers?"

C. I, 7, 5-7:

sunt quibus unum opus est, intactae Palladis urbem
carmine perpetuo celebrare et
undique decerptam fronti praeponere olivam.

Scholars¹² have been puzzled by the meaning of the words *undique decerptam* in line 7. I would like to point out that perfect sense can be restored to this line if we understand that *undique*¹³ means "entirely", "completely". We should translate as follows: "Some there are whose only task is to hymn in eternal song

¹⁰ Peleus was slandered by Cretheis: cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Middlesex 1972, vol. I, page 270.

¹¹ Cf. Horace, *Odes Book I* (Oxford 1970), page 29.

¹² Cf. Nisbet-Hubbard *ad loc.*

¹³ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *undique* I, 2.

(*carmine perpetuo*¹⁴) the town of virgin Pallas, and to prefer (*praeponere*¹⁵) in all respects (*undique*) the olive (*olivam*¹⁶) gathered for their brow (*decerptam fronti*)”.

I, 9, 1-4:

Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte, nec iam sustineant onus
silvae laborantes, geluque
flumina constiterint acuto?

C. E. Bennett¹⁷ translated lines 1-3 as follows: “Seest thou how Soracte stands glistening in its mantle of snow, and how the straining woods no longer uphold their burden?” I would like to suggest that *laborantes*, in line 3, means “labouring men”. Horace states that labouring men do not now uphold the burden of the forest (*onus/silvae*). He is referring to the fact that men are no longer able to carry the wood which has been cut down in the forest.

I, 9, 5-8:

Dissolve frigus ligna super foco
large reponens atque benignius
deprome quadrimum Sabina,
o Thaliarche, merum diota.

line 5 ligna: vina *v.l.*

The reader will note that the mss offer the variant reading *vina* in line 5. I would like to point out that this variant makes good sense. Horace tells us to dispel the cold by placing wine over the hearth.¹⁸

I, 12, 45-48:

Crescit occulto velut arbor aevo
fama Marcelli; micat inter omnes
Iulium sidus, velut inter ignes
luna minores.

¹⁴ For the motif of immortality through poetry cf. G. Giangrande, *Mus. Phil. Lond.*, 4, 1981, page 39.

¹⁵ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *praepono* II: “Trop., to set before or above, to prefer”.

¹⁶ For the poetic singular cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 141. Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *olivifer*: “*corona*, of olive-branches, *Mart.* 12, 99, 1”.

¹⁷ Cf. Horace, *The Odes And Epodes*, Loeb edition, London, 1964, reprint.

¹⁸ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *fumarium*: “a smoke-chamber for ripening wine”. Cf. also Flower Smith’s note on *Tibullus* 2, 1, 27 *fumosos ... Falernos*.

horses and swift chariot very often (plerumque) for a pure man (per purum), whereby the earth was shaken. In lines 1-5 Horace states that although he is an infrequent worshipper of the gods, he is now forced to spread his sails (vela dare) and to praise (iterare²⁴) neglected journeys (cursus/ ... relictos), i.e. the journeys which Augustus²⁵ had made in order to conquer various people. There is a pun in line 9. The words bruta²⁶ tellus (“the heavy earth”) allude to Brutus and the battle of Philippi.

²⁴ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *itero* II, B: “To repeat, rehearse, relate ... to celebrate”.

²⁵ Augustus was also identified with Apollo: cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius* (Athens 2002), page 136.

²⁶ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *brutus* II, A: “Esp. in a play on the name, 2. Brutus”. For the battle of Philippi, in which Brutus was defeated, cf. Horace, *Odes* 2, 7, 9.