

Adultery and Roman Identity in Horace's *Satires*

Horace's protestations against adultery in the *Satires* are usually interpreted as superficial, based not on the morality of the act but on the effort that must be exerted to commit adultery. For instance, in *Satire I.2*, scholars either argue that he is recommending whatever is easiest in a given situation (Lefèvre 1975), or that he is recommending a "golden mean" between the married Roman woman and the prostitute, which would be a freedwoman and/or a courtesan (Fraenkel 1957). It should be noted that in recent years, however, the latter interpretation has been dismissed as a "red herring" in the poem (Gowers 2012). The aim of this paper is threefold: to link the portrayals of adultery in *I.2* and *II.7*, to show that they are based on a deeper reason than easy access to sex, and to discuss the political implications of this portrayal.

Horace argues in *Satire I.2* against adultery not only because it is difficult, but also because the pursuit of a married woman emasculates the Roman man, both metaphorically, and, in some cases, literally. Through this emasculation, the poet also calls into question the adulterer's identity as a Roman. *Satire II.7* develops this idea further, focusing especially on the adulterer's Roman identity. Finally, an analysis of *Epode 9* reveals the political uses and implications of the poet's ideas of adultery and situates them within the larger political moment. Important to this argument is Ronald Syme's claim that Augustus used his poets to subtly spread his ideology (Syme 1960).

In *Satire I.2*, Horace points to specifically emasculating consequences of adultery such as the possibility of rape (line 44) and uses emasculating terms to refer to the adulterer, such as "Cerinthe" (line 81), which Fraenkel associates with the passive *eromenos* in Greek pederastic poetry (Fraenkel 1957). He also juxtaposes the traditionally Roman masculine activities of warfare and hunting with the adulterer's attempts to seduce his beloved, effeminizing his actions,

and then ending the poem with the adulterer fleeing his mistress' husband like a prey animal.

The poet emasculates the adulterer more subtly by often making him the object of a sentence and describing him with passive participles.

This argument is then further developed and clarified in *Satire II.7*. Here, during the Saturnalia, the slave Davus attacks Horace's adulterous ways. He argues that the adulterer is not just a slave, but the worst kind of slave, because he chooses his slavery willingly. The emphasis is upon the giving up of the status of the Roman male in exchange for the status of the lowest slave. At one point, he specifically mentions the giving up of items associated with Roman status for adultery (lines 53-55). Davus also mentions how his master gives up things that are a given for a Roman man but not for a slave, such as bodily autonomy. He concludes by questioning his master's authority over him (lines 75-76) and calling him a wooden puppet, less than human (lines 81-82).

Epode 9 shows how these perceptions of adultery can be harnessed for political gain. The description of Antony in lines 11-16 emphasizes his Roman status, then his enslavement to a woman. The description of the Eastern setting emasculates Octavian's rival as well, since the East was often associated with effeminate men. This depiction not only contributes to Augustan propaganda, but it also brings to mind Horace's ideas of adultery, putting them in dialogue with Antony's legacy.

This attempt to politicize adultery permits us to postulate that Horace's portrayal of it foreshadows the moral reforms and the *Lex Julia*. These poems, published over the tumultuous period leading up to and shortly after the Battle of Actium, reflect the political climate around them and how it evolved over time. They show the stabilization of Horace's and Octavian's political status and demonstrate a subtle shaping of the Roman people towards the understanding

of adultery and Roman identity that underlies Augustus' portrayal of the civil war and platform in the moral reforms.

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