Rem patris oblimare: The Humorous Economy of Horace *Satires* 1.2.61-2

This paper draws upon two overlooked parallels from Roman comedy to elucidate the humor in Horace's *Satires* 1.2.61-2, where the poet declares, *bonam deperdere famam*,/ *rem patris oblimare, malum est ubicumque*, "To lose one's good name,/ to inundate a patrimony with mud, is bad no matter where it happens." In *Satires* 1.2 Horace intertwines the themes of moderation, sexual indulgence, wealth, and reputation to lash the moral self-deception of Rome's decadent upper class. The poet lampoons Sallustius, possibly the historian Sallust (Woodman 2009), for excessively pursuing *libertinae* while vaunting that he does not touch *matronae* (47-54). Horace compares with Sallustius the example of an otherwise unidentified Marsaeus, who gave his ancestral farm to a *mima* while foreswearing the wives of other men (55-63). In each of these cases Horace notes the cost to both fortune and reputation: Sallustius' spending leads to financial loss and disrepute (52-3, *damno/ dedecorique*) while from Marsaeus' entanglements with courtesans his reputation suffers more than his property (58-9, *unde*/ *fama malum gravius quam res trahit*). Horace then reminds us yet again with the lines quoted above (1.2.61-2) that it is bad to lose reputation and sully a patrimony, no matter the status of the paramour.

The squandering of property on sexual liaisons is a topos of Greek and Roman comedy, and parallels from Roman comedy suggest that Horace is here manipulating typical diction from the scolding of wastrels. Lines from an unidentified comedy (*Com. Inc.* 54-5, Ribbeck; perhaps by Afranius; cf. Welsh 2012) show that harm to *fama* and *res* are closely conjoined: "*cur te dedecoras? famam cur maculas tuam?/ cur rem dilapidas, quam miser extruxit labor?*" Similar too is a line from one of Plautus' spendthrift son plays, the *Trinummus*, in which the wastrel Lesbonicus decries his own profligacy, making both his *res patria* and the *gloria* of his ancestors

object of *foedare* (656: *ut rem patriam et gloriam maiorum foedarim meum*). These lines support the consensus of modern commentators, following the suggestion of an ancient scholiast and supported by ancient parallels, that *oblimare* refers to the deposition of mud, and not, as Porphyrio suggested, to frittering away property with a file (*lima*). Instead of ordinary verbs for the sullying of reputation, such as *maculare* and *foedare* in these examples, Horace opts for the image of mud left by floodwaters, which we are probably meant to imagine covering the *fundus* Marsaeus has gifted to a *mima* in line 56 (cf. Kiessling-Heinze 1961, 34, ad loc.). While Plautus' diction suggests that *foedare* can apply to both property and reputation simultaneously, the wording of the unidentified fragment suggests that when *fama* and *res* are considered separately, it is *fama* that conventionally suffers stain (*maculare*), while *res* is typically the object of a conventional verb of squandering (*dilapidare*). Thus it appears that the gift of Marsaeus' farm to a *mima* has given Horace occasion to transfer the metaphor of pollution from *fama* to the *res patris* and amplify it into a natural catastrophe. (For the relevant associations of dirt with disreputable sexual activity, cf. Gowers 2012, 104, ad loc.; Richlin 1992, 26-30.) Furthermore, Horace's *deperdere famam* employs a verb that the poet elsewhere uses to describe a merchant's haste motivated by fear of losing of money (*Sat*. 1.4.31-2, *ne quid/ summa deperdat metuens*). It is argued that this exchange of metaphors creates a memorable inconcinnity, which one might render in English as "to squander a good name,/ to muddy one's inheritance...." This semantic criss-cross is enhanced by the chiastic order evident in *bonam deperdere famam*/ *rem patris oblimare*. The inconcinnity of metaphors and the asymmetrical chiasmus may have a further satiric purpose. Taking into account Woodman's (2009) arguments that the Sallustius in this satire is likely the historian, the paper concludes with an evaluation of the possibility that Horace is ridiculing the historian's stylistic affectations while mocking his hypocrisy.

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