

Penelope the Bitch: The Dog and the Woman in Homer and Horace

In *Satire 2.5*, Horace portrays Penelope as the antithesis of her Homeric counterpart; rather than being the faithful, steadfast wife, Horace's Penelope is easily seduced into the role of *meretrix*. The connections between Horace's Penelope and the deceitful Homeric woman have not been fully explored. Horace's depiction of Penelope goes beyond simple satirical subversion. He equates Penelope with the problematic figures of Clytemnestra and Helen through the image of the dog, and thus reveals his own anxiety about womanhood's inherent bestiality. Horace then connects these manipulative, female legacy hunters with his father, and by extension, with himself, indicating anxiety about his position as a social climber and the son of a *libertus*.

Scholars have delved into the major themes of *Satire 2.5* and the Homeric image of the dog-faced woman, but these pieces have not been connected. It has been convincingly argued that Horace uses the legacy hunting of *Satire 2.5* as a metaphor for his own patron-client relationship with Maecenas (Connors 2006; Klein 2012). Damon (1997) has pointed out that Ulysses of *Satire 2.5* lowers himself to behave like a *mulier dolosa* and a *libertus* when he acts as a *captator*. Thus, Horace, the Ulysses figure, admits to behaving in a manner unfit for his social status as a citizen in his pursuit of Maecenas. However, Horace's reference to the *libertus* recalls his father. Horace, the son of a freedman, is painfully aware that he not so far removed in status from a *libertus*, or from his counterpart, the *mulier dolosa*. Scholars note the reversal of Penelope from virtuous wife to *meretrix* (Roberts 1984). Penelope-as-dog joins a rich textual history of Greek women as untrustworthy canines (Franco 2014). Penelope is cast as the *mulier dolosa*, and Horace's anxiety about the fallible character of even the famously upright Penelope matches his own anxiety about his character as the son of a *libertus*.

Horace associates Penelope with Clytemnestra and Helen, in spite of the fact that these untrustworthy and manipulative wives are the antithesis of Homer's Penelope. *Satire 2.5* is a parody of Odysseus' conversation with the shade of Tiresias in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, and in the satire, Tiresias calls Penelope a *canis* (*Sat. 2.5.83*). This recalls another of Odysseus' conversations with shades in Book 11. Odysseus speaks with the shade of Agamemnon, who calls his murderous wife Clytemnestra *κυνῶπις* (*Od.11.424*). In the same conversation, Odysseus blames Helen and Clytemnestra for all the evil which has befallen Agamemnon. Agamemnon himself agrees, but also warns Odysseus not to fully trust Penelope, in spite of the fact that she is *πινυτή* and *περίφρων* (*Od.11.445*). The connection between this passage and Horace's illustration of Penelope in *Satires 2.5* is emphasized by Horace's parallel description "*tam frugi tamque pudica* (*Sat. 2.5.77*)," which Horace's Tiresias uses to describe Penelope. Both Tiresias and Agamemnon make the same point with these lines: despite her chastity and prudence, Penelope is capable of deceptive deeds.

There is another prominent reference to dogs in Homer: the dogs that eat the bodies of the dead. Bodies of dead heroes are "*ἑλώρια [...] κύνεσσιν* (*Il.1.4*)" and Priam later dreads the dogs that will eat his naked flesh and that of his sons (*Il.22.66-76*). The flesh eating dog of Homer is a particularly important image for understanding *Satires 2.5*. Horace describes Penelope: "*ut canis a corio numquam absterrebitur uncto* (*Sat. 2.5.83*)." Penelope is a dog who is drawn to the smell of flesh. Horace not only connects Penelope to other doglike women, but he also is sure to delineate that Penelope has the potential to be a destructive, man-eating dog. Horace's Tiresias echoes the sentiment of Agamemnon in *Odyssey 11*; Penelope seems so prudent and chaste, but she has the capacity to turn into a dangerous, doglike woman, just like Clytemnestra and Helen. Despite Penelope's pristine reputation, she has the capacity to manipulate and betray men.

Her reputation means nothing; Horace is displaying an anxiety about the potential for any woman to be seduced by money and to become the *mulier dolosa*, just as Horace, the son of a *libertus*, has become the *captator*.

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