

IT IS PROVERBIAL, THAT THERE IS NO AUTHOR in the classical antiquity comparable to Horace—at least regarding the huge amount of information provided on and by himself in his own works. However, it was earlier than a century, when the idea of the „death of the author” first appeared on pages written by—ironically—poets, writers and other authors, and finally, scholars. And according to Roland Barthes the author is not only dead, but he or she has been never more than a modern construction born together with English empiricism, French rationalism and Reformation. Anyway, Michel Foucault admits that in the texts always can be found signs referring to the author, even if the referred one is not a living person, but a so called 'second I', whose distance from the 'copyright owner' author is not fixed, and can easily change even in the very same book. „*What does the author want to say to us? What is the originality in his or her attitude?*” Antoine Compagnon says that the answers fly away, but these questions stay: despite of the efforts of the literary theory the old questions like those are valid and rise interest. '*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*', said Flaubert, but—as András Kappanyos states—'*Ivanhoe, ce n'était pas Scott*', and Lucian was not Balzac, nor Raskolnikov was Dostoyevsky, because Madame Bovary is merely an everyday personality of a most common career.

The poet of Venosa—whit his well-known understatement—could say: „Horace, this merely everyday personality, it is me.” That is

the reason why it seems worthy to examine a special element of his works, namely the author. Of course, not the real author, who the poems wrote, but that Horace, who was written by them. The poet in this case is not he subject or aim of the examination, but is its mean, its instrument. The question of my thesis is: what can be said about the poetry of Horace, examining the portrait of the poet, drawn by himself.

The first step in our examination is to define the position of the person examining. It is highly possible that the idea that a reader can reach directly the meaning of a classical text, is a dream. It is impossible to imagine a naïve interpretation, because there is no naïve reader (if I may be so bold as to say that a reader is *per definitionem* not naïve). Talking of Horace, usually we talk about his reception. But maybe we can make capital of this weakness. If we take a closer look to the most important points of Horace's reception, then in this indirect way of researching we possibly can detect some neglected features both of Horace's poetry and the recipients' ideas.

My thesis, first of all, examines four important moments of Horace's Hungarian reception: two emblematic volumes of translations, and the Roman poets relation to Berzsenyi and to two contemporary authors, György Petri and Szabolcs Várady. It appears from the analysis that the time of their birth left its fingerprint on the volumes containing different translations of Horaces works.

Trencsényi-Waldapfel's *Horatius noster* was published before (and reprinted during) World War II, and a mindful reader can not help

feeling that the portrait of Horace in this book is painted in darker colors, than those of its model. However, the translations not falsify Horace at all, but they create their own picture on him, which is enriched by features of the translators and their times. E.g. Horaces seems to be melancholic for many times, but what concerns *c. I 11*, the melancholy dominates only the translation, because the Latin original has rather a tone of voice of ‘Come on, baby, light my fire’.

The other book, published by Borzsák and Devecseri, provides Horaces’ full text in Hungarian, and has been edited just after the revolution of the year 1956. The quality of the translations is far from homogenous, and this fact can be easily explained by the high number of the contributors. It seems that it was a policy of the editors to try and bring almost every living poet in the project, with no regard for example to their political records (inclusively the imprisonments of two of them after the revolution). No one can admire that a book of uneven quality standard provoked extremely different judgments from the reviewers’ side. Analyzing the debate, it is clear at the first glance that the critics’ and the editors’ approaches were absolutely incompatible. The different opinions—as usual—lay on the differences of tastes and principles. The most important element of the astonishingly long, deep and burning debate was nothing but its tone. A careful analysis can point out that the critics (the most important and learned of them was the poet István Vas) used a special language of freedom fight, while the editor Devecseri and some defenders of the book praising the work and

refusing the other approaches and principles speak the language of repression. In 1961, only five years after the revolution—and years before the last executions—it seems that Horace’s poems made an unforeseen occasion of free talk.

Free talk is an important question of György Petri’s and Szabolcs Várady’s oeuvre, too, let alone Horace’s poetry itself. The political circumstances of the late Kádár regime do not lack of similarities with the ‘*pax Romana*’ of Augustus. The Roman and two millennium later the Hungarian society went trough of shocks of wars and serious political changes, the form of state was a kind of dictatorship, while life standards were rising. Among these circumstances artists hardly found independence in the new political system. Reading Horace and his Hungarian colleagues, it seems that melancholy, irony, and playful stile belong to the repertoire of techniques of the poets in a period of soft dictatorship.

If we compare Horaces subjects, tone of voice and attitude to those of Berzsenyi (who is generally held as the most Horatian of all Hungarian poets), behind the surface of similarities we find important differences. Berzsenyi lived a more isolated life, and isolation in his poetry played a much more important role than in Horace’s (who loved to spend time in the countryside, too). Probably that is why Berzsenyi’s attitude differed from that of his admired models: the only possible exit of his isolation opened through visions. He is much more visionary a poet than Horace was. Berzsenyi found a spiritual height somehow

outside of himself, from where he was able to put a general glance on the nation, human life and history, while Horace found a depth in his personality, to where—with more or less success—he was able to withdraw from the vicissitudes of the world outside.

So far the *Fortleben* of the poet, which is—from the readers' point of view—a *Vorleben*, because the way to Horace lead through the forest of the tradition: there is no naïve reader with no presuppositions, there is no royal road.

The most important ancient sources on Horace's life are his oeuvre and the *vita* attributed to Suetonius. The latter one has two obelised passages: Maecenas' epigram, and two words in an excerpt of a letter of the Augustus, the emperor.

The small epigram reads as follows:

*Ni te visceribus meis, Horati,
plus iam diligo, tu tuum sodalem
nimio videas strigiosiore,*

The editors—with no exemption—tried to solve the *crux* by finding an *abl. comparationis* in *nimio*, but if we do not forget that the model of these three lines is in a poem of Catullus (c. 14,1sq), it becomes obvious, that in that place we have to expect an *abl. causae*:

*Ni te plus oculis meis amarem,
iucundissime Calvus, munere isto
odissem te odio Vatiniano.*

My conjecture (*vino isto*) fits not only the place, but to the tone of voice of the Horatius—Maecenas relationship, as well, and the subject (wine) is also very Horatian. Just like the other *crux*:

*'Pertulit ad me Onysius libellum tuum, quem ego fut accusantem
quantuluscumque est, boni consulo. Vereri autem mihi videris ne maiores
libelli tui sint, quam ipse es. Sed tibi statura deest, corpusculum non deest.
Itaque licebit in sextariolo scribas, quo circuitus voluminis tui sit
ογκοδέστατος, sicut est ventriculi tui.'*

Scholars try to correct '*accusantem*', but I think that if wa a probleme read an *et concessivum* instead of *ut*, it is hardly conjectural, and solves the problem of syntax. The structure of '*Tuum libellum et accusantem (quantuluscumque) est boni consulo*' is similar to the well known '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*'.

It is more than interesting that the subject of this vexed *locus* is wine drinking again (*sextariolus* is a wine jar). Wine is one of Horace's favorite subject. My analysis has shown that he mentions wine, vine, Bacchus etc. almost in the half of his poems. Wine has many different roles in Horace's poetry: wine is a source of inspiration, it solves the tongue, makes one's moving uncertain, sets free the violent instincts, increases self-confidence, decreases the sense of danger and the self-control, injurious to the ability to work and health, and it is hallucinogen. Sometimes it is mentioned as a sacral object, a reliever of

pains, symbol of wealth, a remedy of mortality. Most of the time, when Horace writes on wine, he talks about drinking on convivial occasions, but the second on the list is immoderate drinking. According to my analysis, wine drinking has close relation to melancholy (some time I can help calling it lethargy or depression). Horace was a man of his times, a sensitive talented poet, who suffered from the vicissitudes of the political, social and military events. As it seems from his poems, it was not easy to handle his humble family background, the loss of his heritage, and dreams, to face with mortality. The ‘Golden Mean’ was only one remedy. There were two more: wine and leisure, remedies of dubious effect on Horaces spleen (*iam vino quaerens, iam somno fallere curam, frustra: nam comes atra premit sequiturque fugacem* — *serm* II 7 114sq) but sometimes excellent stimulants of his creativity (*Scriptorum chorus omnis amat nemus et fugit urbem, rite cliens Bacchi somno gaudentis et umbra* — *epist.* II. 2, 77sq).

But one has to admit, sometimes the spleen was the winner:

*non horam tecum esse potes, non otia recte
ponere teque ipsum vitas fugitivus et erro,
iam vino quaerens, iam somno fallere curam,
frustra: nam comes atra premit sequiturque fugacem*
(*epist.* II 7, 112sq)

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