

This paper identifies two distinct methods of interpretation operating in Horace's summaries of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (*Epist.* 1.2). The *Epistle* advises Lollius to look to Homer for moral edification, and presents accounts of the two epics. Although Horace's summaries are colored by themes of the major philosophical schools (Eidinow 1990; Edwards 1992; Armstrong 2004, 276-279), his interpretive method is neither entirely conventional nor monolithic. Rather, he demonstrates two equally tendentious and flawed methods of reading, which themselves echo the moral problems featured in the two epics. The *Iliad* can tempt the reader into seeking disengaged entertainment, while the *Odyssey* encourages the reader to identify with its flawed characters to the point of self-absorption. Lollius is challenged to find the all-important virtuous mean (cf. *Epist.* 1.18.9) even in the practice of reading.

Relating a myth at *Sat.* 1.1.69-70, Horace warns his reader that "with a name-change, the story is about *you*." The *Epistles*, too, recommend self-scrutiny in a variety of contexts. But in summarizing the *Iliad*, Horace does not direct Lollius to identify with the poem's moral conflicts. He erases the roles of the author and hypothetical reader, simply describing the poem as a "tale [that] contains turmoil" (*fabula...continet aestus*, 6-8). The plot is represented as a series of symmetrical offenses by Greeks and Trojans, kings and armies, with everyone sharing the blame. Leaders and their peoples are foolish (8), both sides in the war spurn sound advice (9-12), and anger grips both Achilles and Agamemnon (13). The final summary is generalizing and impersonal: the *Iliad* tells of "wrong done inside and outside the walls of Troy" (*Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra*, 16). The account is constructed as a kind of *teichoscopia* that grants the reader a comfortable distance. Lollius is enticed simply to enjoy the spectacle, and like the epic's flawed characters, to cast blame on others while believing himself to be blameless.

The *Odyssey* summary, as Horace's transition hints (*rursus*, 17), is the polar opposite. Homer's role and the reader's are immediately underscored: the epic poet "put forth for us a useful exemplar" in the courageous and wise Ulysses (*utile proposuit nobis exemplar*, 18). Horace reproduces Homer's opening lines that focus on the hero (19-22). "We" are also involved in this account from the beginning, but especially when Horace turns to the host of temptations and negative exempla in the poem. The Sirens' songs and Circe's potions are enticements close to home (*nosti*, 23). As for Ulysses' careless crew, the dissolute suitors, and the hedonistic Phaeacians (23-31), "we are" every one of these weak mobs (*nos numerus sumus*, 27). Horace invites Lollius to project himself fully onto the text's characters and situations - the more, and the more flawed, the better. This method of reading, while morally engaged and self-critical, verges on the narcissistic. The reader who sees himself everywhere indulges in a vice of excess that mirrors the sloth, luxury, and greed of his epic alter egos. Self-criticism that is so self-indulgent is unlikely to be any more constructive than the disengaged amusement to be derived from smugly watching Greeks and Trojans destroy one another. Horace's diatribe in the rest of the *Epistle* works to counter the *Odyssey* reader's paralysis: to heal oneself, one must first "wake up" (33).

The self-aware adult returning to Homer must avoid the poles of detachment and self-obsession, temptations that the texts themselves offer. Horace's subtle critical exercise is thus more challenging, and more instructive, than a monolithic analysis would be; it is also more closely interwoven with the themes of the *Epistles*. This poet knows that literature contains traps as well as lessons, and that one's choices in interpretation are part of the process of self-improvement.