



## **“Turba grauis paci placidaequae inimica quieti”: on delatores and spying (and on code of silence) in the Latin poetry of imperial period**

**Arianna Sacerdoti**<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD in Alta Formazione, Associate Professor in Latin Literature and Language, Department of Humanities, Università della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli", Santa Maria Capua Vetere (CE), Italy

### **Abstract**

*Several are the studies on code of silence, delatores and spy in ancient Rome. This paper discusses secondary literature and brings new results in analyzing Martial's and Juvenal's passages. The research is fresh and new and it reveals connections between past and present.*

**Keywords:** Art of spying, Diffamation, Deprecable chains, Corruption, Rhymes

The art of spying is ancient and still present in current days. A beautiful monograph, by M. Federica Petracca, "In rebus agere. Il mestiere di spia nell'antica Roma", Bologna 2012, Pàtron, which is online at the link [https://www.academia.edu/1504677/In\\_rebus\\_agere\\_Il\\_mestiere\\_di\\_spia\\_nellantica\\_Roma\\_P%C3%A0tron\\_e\\_ditore\\_Bologna\\_2012?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/1504677/In_rebus_agere_Il_mestiere_di_spia_nellantica_Roma_P%C3%A0tron_e_ditore_Bologna_2012?auto=download) analyzes the bad reputation in common opinion of the spying and referring things related to other people, for diffamation or revenge. For further bibliography see Id., p. 10:

“Negli ultimi anni sono stati dati alle stampe numerosi scritti riguardanti i servizi segreti nel mondo antico (Austin - Rankov, 1995; Sheldon, 2008 a; Liberati - Silverio, 2010). Roma ebbe mai un’“intelligence” degna di questo nome? In caso affermativo, quali furono i funzionari ad essa deputati? Sono mai esistite a Roma figure di spia o di agente segreto così come le intendiamo noi oggi? Potrebbero essere rappresentate da un personaggio come Didio Falco, l’investigatore privato al servizio di Vespasiano, frutto della fantasia di Lindsay Davis? O appare più credibile un eroe letterario come Publio Aurelio, il “detective” in toga contemporaneo dell’imperatore Claudio, creato da Danila Comastri Montanari? Sono queste le domande a cui si cercherà di dare risposta con questo breve saggio”.

One must consider also Rose Mary Sheldon, *Guerra segreta nell'antica Roma. Intelligence e spionaggio dalla Repubblica al 284 d.C.*, Gorizia 2008, LEG ed.

One important point that the author discusses is the fact that a secret, once discovered, is not a secret anymore. The difference between good and bad people is clear in spreading and revealing a secret, and the multiple and deprecable chains of dissemination of a secret by evil people is a bad action and should be punished. The conceit of code of silence is connected to the one of revealing a secret. The crowd of people who know and do nothing is similar to the ignavi of Dante’s comedy. The link between popular music and classical antiquity is well-known (see at least Davide Mennella Bettino, “Miti pop. Il mito classico nella popular music dagli anni Cinquanta a oggi”, Milano 2016, Arcana ed.), so we can quote Lorenzo Cherubini Jovanotti (“Mario”, from “Lorenzo 1994”):

“Gli dirò che ogni schiaffo e ogni pugno che hai dato  
ogni piccolo diritto che nel mondo hai violato  
è una ferita per tutti gli esseri della terra  
e finché non c’è giustizia ci sarà sempre guerra”.

This gets the point of the code of silence. The beautiful book by Federica Petracca deserves attention. The relationship between pure and bad people can make one think about Dante, above already mentioned. At p. 43 she mentions the corruption connected to spying. So the pure will gain peace and happiness and the evil one will be punished in hell. One can consider also the blog <https://www.romanoimpero.com/2018/06/servizi-segreti-romani.html>, in which we read

“La notizia più antica dei servizi segreti romani sono le spie usate da Scipione l'Africano, quando scoprì che il suo nemico Annibale ne usava ovunque, onde combatterlo con le stesse sue armi. Scipione l'Africano, generale di grande valore e intelligenza, come poi farà Cesare, usava addestrare gli uomini a lungo prima di coinvolgerli in una battaglia, e così addestrò anche le spie che divennero contemporaneamente le sue guide”.

Let us briefly look at Livy and Silius. In 2017 and 2020 I have published on Silius and Capua (Sacerdoti 2017, Sacerdoti 2020). One must necessarily see also Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus to introduce Silius and his relationship with Livy. Hannibal is a complex hero, refusing sleeping in order to think about the war. One does not be surprised that he uses spies, because he is fond of war. To introduce Hannibal's figure, see Kenneth Ogilvie Matier, Hannibal: the Real Hero of the 'Punica?', in «Acta Classica», 32 (1989), pp. 3-17. But it is especially Martial who speaks about spies. The Latin word is *delator*. Let us see the passages (Mart., 4, 1, 6)[1]:

Turba gravis paci placidaeque inimica quieti,  
 quae semper miseris sollicitabat opes,  
 traducta est, ingens nec cepit harena nocentis:  
 et delator habet quod dabat exilium.  
 Exulat Ausonia profugus delator ab urbe:  
 haec licet impensis principis adnumeres.

At the beginning we see the crowd which is against peace. The nominative *delator* brings us to the main topic of this article. On the datation of Martial's *De libro spectaculorum* see T. V. Buttrey, *Domitian, the Rhinoceros and the Date of Martial's Liber de spectaculis*, in “The Journal of Roman Studies” Vol. 97 (2007), pp. 101-112; on Martial see Giuseppe Norcio, *Introduzione*, in Marziale, *Epigrammi*, Torino 1980, UTET, with a good survey on Martial's life. Let us look at one more poem (Mart., 66):

Et delator es et calumniator,  
 Et fraudator es et negotiator,  
 Et fellator es et lanista. miror  
 Quare non habeas, Vacerra, nummos.

Rhymes, internal rhymes, a good rhythm make this poem beautiful. So, from these two poems, the witty Martial reveals to be very conscious of *delatores*. It is important to note that in the imperial period the one most affected by the practice of spying. We therefore find Juvenal on this topic (Iuv. 1, 26-39)[2]:

Cum pars Niliacae plebis, cum uerna Canopi  
 Crispinus Tyrias umero reuocante lacernas  
 Ventilet aestiuum digitis sudantibus aurum  
 Nec sufferre queat maioris pondera gemmae,  
 Difficile est saturam non scribere. nam quis iniquae  
 Tam patiens urbis, tam ferreus, ut teneat se,  
 Causidici noua cum ueniat lectica Mathonis  
 Plena ipso, post hunc magni delator amici  
 Et cito rapturus de nobilitate comesa  
 Quod superest, quem Massa timet, quem munere palpat  
 Carus et a trepido Thymele summissa Latino;  
 Cum te summoueant qui testamenta merentur  
 Noctibus, in caelum quos euehit optima summi  
 Nunc uia processus, uetulae uesica beatae?

Juvenal is well-known for his aggressivity, and one is not surprised that he deals with the code of silence and the diffusion of information, a bad practice. We still find Juvenal (Iuv. 3, 109-118) :

Praeterea sanctum nihil \*aut\* ab inguine tutum,  
 Non matrona laris, non filia uirgo, nec ipse  
 Sponsus leuis adhuc, non filius ante pudicus.  
 Horum si nihil est, auiam resupinat amici.  
 [Scire uolunt secreta domus atque inde timeri.]  
 Et quoniam coepit Graecorum mentio, transi

Gymnasia atque audi facinus maioris abollae.  
Stoicus occidit Baream delator amicum  
Discipulumque senex ripa nutritus in illa  
Ad quam Gorgonei delapsa est pinna caballi.

On Juvenal, see at least Catherine Clare Keane, *Theatre, Spectacle, and the Satirist in Juvenal*, in "Phoenix" Vol. 57, No. 3/4 (Autumn - Winter, 2003), pp. 257-275. Again Juvenal (Iuv. 10, 65-72):  
Pone domi laurus, duc in Capitolia magnum

Cretatumque bouem: Seianus ducitur unco Spectandus, gaudent omnes. "quae labra, quis illi  
Vultus erat! numquam, si quid mihi credis, amaui  
Hunc hominem. sed quo cecidit sub crimine? quisnam  
Delator quibus indicibus, quo teste probavit?"  
"Nil horum; uerbosa et grandis epistula uenit  
A Capreis." "bene habet, nil plus interrogo."

In conclusion of this work, we can state that imperial period is one of flourishing activity of spying. Important poets such as Martial and Juvenal speak of *delatores*. Bad practices, the code of silence, but also a proper formal attention make these poems readable, and give a significant evidence of the ancient art of being a *delator*. Connections to the present are evident.

### Works Citation

[1] All the quotations from Martial are of W. M. Lindsay, 1929.

[2] All the quotations from Juvenal are from W. V. Clausen, 1966.