The betrayal of the satirical text

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Abstract Literary scholars use various methods to undermine and reject explicit declarations of the Roman verse satire. This paper argues that not only do these scholars develop some strategies to avoid facing uncomfortable messages, but that the satirical text also offers an opportunity to subvert its own utterances. Although the dialogic nature of literature (and language in general) always offers opportunities for subversive interpretations that refuse to accept the proclaimed ideas at face value, the satirical text has a special feature, since it tends to say what it says with some ambiguity. The paper calls this the betrayal of the satirical text, which through the very act of (humorous) textualization opens the gates for opposing or subverting interpretations. The second part of the paper analyses Satires 1.7 by Horace, underscoring how various implications of the poetic discourse create opportunities to undermine the proffered ideas. A text that seems to try to stabilize Roman elite identity may lead to a retracing of the boundaries between Romans and aliens, the elite and the pariahs.

Keywords Satire · Horace · Satires 1.7 · Dialogism · Juvenal

Juvenal’s third satire contains a series of terribly xenophobic utterances that make many readers of today feel uncomfortable. Recent interpreters of the text tend to emphasize, however, that the unacceptable ideas are not uttered by the poet directly, but by a character of the scene staged in the satire. He is called Vmbricus, whom the poet (another character in the mini-drama) quotes. Significantly, the poet cites only his farewell speech, and does not seem to agree with him completely. And even if he...
did, Vmbricius is not represented as a clear-minded figure of exemplary morals; therefore readers should not accept his ideas. They are rather supposed to criticize the stupidities this stupid character puts forth (Braund 1988, pp. 11–15; Hooley 2007, pp. 117–118; see also Staley 2000).

Satires make quite frequent use of second grade speakers. Or perhaps the satirical speaker should always be regarded as a second grade speaker. Even if he is not given a name different from that of the author, we can suppose that he is playing a role on an imaginary stage (Braund 1996). The persona of this satirical speaker and the implied author should be differentiated. Let us suppose that the text is aware of staging a disagreeable person, then we can conclude that it does not expect the readers to be as indignant as the speaker is, but, rather, to laugh at the speaker. In such interpretations the satirical persona is regarded as an alazon, to use Northrop Frye’s terminology (Frye 1957, p. 172). He is a boasting, impertinent figure, running everybody down, while being at least as ridiculous as the target of his criticism.

While Horace seemed to focus on the stabilization of his own group identity, and this was definitely an aristocratic male identity, the (more or less fictitious) persona Juvenal’s satires staged no longer belonged to the highest elite. The first-person speaker says he needs very little daily support (while Maecenas is said to have supported Horace with one or two rather expensive estates), and he gives the impression of hating all the foreigners because of the rivalry in the everyday struggle to make a living. Although mockery and abuse flow freely in Juvenal’s satires, which is rightly described as the consequence of the routine of rhetorical education, the targets and the contents of the abuse cannot be accidental. What is a real scandal in Juvenal’s eyes is the presence of newcomers who might be extremely rich and have the right to live among “real” Romans and compete with them. There is no problem with the existence of others, as long as they play the role of a passive mass to be exploited. Even if they are present in the city of Rome, supposing they are somewhere lower down on the social hierarchy, their different habits and clothes can be discussed with some light mockery. However, when the problem of their rights and social prestige arises, extreme hostility may be expressed. It is the first time the Greeks are attacked because they are Greek—in Rome (Rudd 1986, p. 184). The Juvenal of the first satire and the Vmbricius of the third agree in that regard. Since ‘Greek’ does not mean ethnicity here, but more or less Hellenized people from the eastern parts of the Mediterranean, it rather expresses xenophobia in general. It is easy to see in this attitude some anachronistic discrepancy: in Juvenal’s times more than half of the senate was recruited from the eastern provinces. A petty client should not have been so exclusive in his hunt for possible patrons (Rudd 1986, p. 188). Therefore it is easy to see both the second grade

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1 For the theatrical (aspect, theme, character, topic?) in the satire see especially Keane (2006), pp. 13–41.

2 It must be emphasised that we are only making use of Frye’s terminology, while in his analysis of “the mythos of winter: irony and satire” the option of the satirist as an alazon never appears, while he mentions that alazons are frequently attacked in and by satires: “the satirist may employ a plain, common-sense, conventional person as a foil for the various alazons of society. Such a person may be the author himself or a narrator” (Frye 1957, p. 226).
speaker Vmbricius and the satirical persona as problematic or ridiculous. But does that make the xenophobic discourse unreal or non-credible?

In the sixth poem of his first book of satires, Horace appears to narrate his personal life history. The speaker seems to do his very best to create the impression that he is identical to the poet. He speaks of his father, the calamities of his early life, and his friendship with Maecenas. For centuries it was easily accepted as a completely honest autobiography. It became a commonplace in the 20th century that self-representation is not identical with the self; therefore “honesty” is neither accepted nor looked for in a poem any more. In this particular poem Horace declares three times that his father was a freedman. This declaration of the family’s social status became one of the most fixed biographical details in Roman literary histories ever.

Since the publication of a paper by Gordon Williams, however, many scholars treat this “fact” with doubt or simply declare that it is not true. The suspicion comes from its apparent incompatibility with some other biographical data: the father figure in the same poem does not show any trait of a (forced) immigrant and the obviously expensive education provided to his son suggested some conservative and definitely Italian persuasion. But, above all, Horace’s role in the civil war as a *tribunus militum*, as far as we know, could not be played by the son of a slave. Some doubt may be appropriate, but how can we deny an explicit and twice repeated declaration of the poet himself? The argument is based exactly on the literal repetition, and the context. The speaker is Horace here, but he is said to be quoting some detractors, as if saying, “that is the name some people are calling me; do you see how absurd it is?” Williams elaborated a rather plausible hypothesis to explain why people could call Horace the son of a freedman if he was not. His father might have been involved in the Social War against Rome, and after the capture of Venusia he was possibly sold among other captives for a shorter period as a punishment. The story is rather satisfactory: if it is true, Horace’s father was not a real slave, but it explains where the idea could have come from. Unfortunately the hypothesis cannot be proved. What is important, however, is not why people called Horace a freedman’s son (if they did), but the convincing suggestion that the passage should be interpreted as quoting others’ utterances instead of being a direct utterance by the autobiographical speaker.

I have referred to these examples of an interpretive practice to show how the satirical text allows its more or less clear-cut declarations to dissolve under pressure.

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3 At least when a critic has basic theoretical training.
4 sat. 1.6.6, 1.6.45, and 1.6.46.
5 To be exact, doubt was expressed also before Williams’ paper, see e.g. White (1982), p. 52. The question is not settled at all. While the cliché of the freedman father can be found in many recent publications (e.g. Keane 2006, pp. 106, 109), a new survey of Roman satire formulates the problem as follows: “His father was, according to Horace (1.6), a freedman, but it is likely he was never a slave in the traditional sense” (Hooley 2007, p. 29).
6 The second place (Nunc ad me redeo, libertinio patre natum / quem rodunt omnes libertinio patre natum.) was translated by C. Smart and Th. Buckley as follows: “Now I return to myself, who am descended from a freedman; whom everybody nibbles at, as being descended from a freed-man.” According to the recent, skeptical interpretation it would be: “Now I return to myself, who am ‘descended from a freedman’; whom everybody nibbles at, as if I were descended from a freedman.”
It goes without saying that I do not regard the above interpretations as wrong or invalid. However, if the general approach to a satirical text is to challenge the obviously offered meaning by undermining the reliability of the message as uttered by a less than convincing speaker, does a satirical writer ever have a chance to be taken seriously if he wants to say something uncomfortable? This is, of course, a rhetorical question. Seemingly it scrutinizes the author’s intention, but actually it does not. My intention is not to defend the authors’ right to advertise ideas I do not accept. And I do not complain because authors have no means to supervise readers and fix the interpretation of their texts. I would rather like to highlight a feature of the satirical text, namely that it creates a context for practically every utterance in which it can be, or—as a rule—is undermined. When I speak of the betrayal of the satirical text I do not mean that the satirical text betrays its author (maybe it does, depriving them of their authority through the very act of textualisation), but that it betrays its own utterances.

It is worth emphasizing that I refer to interpretations that are not embedded in the paradigm of deconstruction. The quoted scholars do not try to follow the free play of the signifiers wherever it leads them, but rather seem to believe in a classic Jakobsonian model of communication, in which the text is supposed to carry a message to the receiver; thus the interpreter’s task is rather to decode a message. Meaning for them is not an event that occurs when a text meets a reader. Nevertheless they develop interpretive strategies which block, isolate, or neutralize the text’s explicit utterances to make them harmonize with the modern readers’ predisposition. They might be trying to play down the cultural otherness and the political incorrectness of ancient texts to make them more marketable in contemporary academic life, but it may also be a characteristic feature of the satirical text that it allows or even provokes such strategies. If it is, we have to take into consideration that satirical provocation is a matter of degree. Since every text needs the readers’ interpretive activity to be meaningful (or to mean anything) in a given context, theoretically every text may encounter interpretations that refuse to accept its declarations at face value. The responses of literary theory to this situation vary from Stanley Fish’s concept that a text can mean absolutely anything depending on interpretive contexts and intentions or on the given interpretive community (Fish 1980) to Umberto Eco’s efforts to eliminate invalid interpretations (e.g. Eco 1992).

The problem seems to cover an even wider area if we consider it in the context of the dialogic nature of literary communication or even language. Students of Mikhail Bakhtin’s œuvre tend to be puzzled by the question of whether dialogism is a general characteristic of human utterances or rather a great achievement of novelistic discourse, especially the novels by Dostoevsky. In his book Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics, Bakhtin seems to imply that most novels are not really of dialogic nature, and Dostoevsky is the great exception. The first version of his Dostoevsky book was published in 1929, but in his 1934–35 essay “Discourse in the novel” he already argued that the novel as such is dialogic, while poetic language is always and by its nature monologic. His analysis of dialogism, however, is so

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7FL01  See especially the chapter “Discourse in poetry and discourse in the novel” (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 275–300).

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convincing that one can hardly imagine how a non-dialogic poetic discourse is even possible. Be that as it may, if “the way in which the word conceives its objects complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intellegibility,” and any image of any object “may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 277), the satirical utterances are also voiced in a dialogic space where an extreme opinion may not only remind us of various other opinions (uttered by different social groups), but implies them, since it is conceived as a response to them. A reader taking a position against the explicit utterance may perform a legitimate act in the dialogic play inscribed in and activated by the word.8

The trope of irony offers a further theoretical option to cope with readers’ rejection of explicit content. Irony was traditionally defined as an utterance opposite (or at least different from) the speaker’s intention. That intention, however, cannot be proved if the context does not give a direct clue. The speaker’s intention therefore is hardly more than a working hypothesis to cope with uncomfortable utterances. Recent definitions of irony tend to get rid of the notion of intention, and suppose that it derives from some contradiction between words and context or some semantic or syntactic deviation that invites ironic interpretations (e.g. Fowler 1987, pp. 128–129). However, careful readers unwilling to accept the ideology of an utterance will be able to find contradictions everywhere, especially if they have to face fundamentalist texts that as a rule do not stick to a strict logic.9 The internet has become “rife” with the uncertainty of ironic and literal interpretations, and the so-called Poe’s law can be regarded as a commonplace nowadays, according to which “it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between parodies of religious or other fundamentalism and its genuine proponents.”10

All of the aforementioned thoughts suggest that cases when one can rely on a stabilized meaning are the exception rather than the rule. Such exceptions, however, are not rare in the history of reading, though they always need a power to enforce the privileged interpretation. When a text and an interpretation are quite important in a given culture, a power play may start that prevents people from interpreting the text as they want and to make sure that they accept the official interpretation.

If this is the situation, do satirical texts have any special feature that provokes destabilizing interpretations? Maybe they do. Thomas Habinnek described Roman verse satire as an aristocratic play, which, after all, intends to re-establish the elite male identity by ridiculing its others, like foreigners, women, philosophers and so on. In order to ridicule them, however, the satire must stage them, and in order to silence them it must allow them to speak. Their existence, as a serious threat, cannot be denied if the defence of the authority of the elite male wants to be successfully performed (Habinnek 2005). Therefore the voice of the other must be present in the satirical text simultaneously with its refutation. The playful nature of the satirical

8 The idea that speakers cannot even remotely control their utterances, since the language is uncontrollable, has been famously formulated by Martin Heidegger: “Die Sprache spricht nicht der Mensch. Der Mensch spricht nur, indem er geschicklich der Sprache entspricht” (Heidegger 1957, p. 161).
9 On my concerns about irony see Hajdu (2007).
discourse makes it is also possible that the “Other” speaks as the main speaker of
the text, the satirical persona. And undermining the speaker’s authority may be a
useful device, through which “the satirist can both say ‘the speaker’s statement’ and
un-say it” (Plaza 2006, p. 4). His authority is usually undermined by some general
tensions of the speaker’s personality and the way the ridiculed material is presented,
since he boasts that he is telling the plain truth, but extensively manipulates his
material; he claims to hate vice, but is always looking for it; his merciless attacks
challenge his alleged probity; he combines self-righteousness with aggressive
criticism, which suggests he is an egoistic monster.11 If such tensions are encoded in
the satirical discourse, it is hardly surprising that all the utterances can be
undermined by the interpretation and that the satirical text betrays its explicit
statements. In the following parts of this paper, however, I will not discuss a text of
easily deconstructable persona, but rather the uncontrollable implications of a
seemingly simple act of story-telling.

Satire is usually said to be the genre of the city (Hodgart 1967, p. 129). From the
viewpoint of the situation of literary communication and the institutional context of
literature this can be true of the majority of literary genres. The statement, however,
can be verified from a thematic aspect; the urban setting and an urban way of life
tend to play a preeminent role in satire. And the thematic viewpoint can lead to
poetic conclusions, if the question is how literature can speak of city life. A
paratactic poetics, the parade of little images and various themes, or an associative
structure can be connected to a city experience (cf. Braund 1989).

The “Golden Age” of Augustus parallels our global perspective from many
vantage points. A unified world was created not only from the viewpoint of
economics, but also from that of administration and culture. It can be said that
Roman literature was part of a Hellenized communication system supported by a
Hellenized elite trained in a culture that extended almost to the whole “known”
world. It would seem logical that such a literature could be something similar to
what we consider as cosmopolitan. The example of satire—that most Roman of all
genres of Roman literature—proves it was not. Even if the impact of Greek culture
was huge and fundamental to many areas of Roman life and culture in that period,
that did not necessarily imply any friendly or tolerant attitude towards foreigners.
Greek culture—just like Greek labour or material resources of any occupied
territory—was something to be exploited, and had no consequences in everyday
contacts with the immigrants in the city of Rome.

Sometimes it is said that there is an immense difference between the early and
later poetry of Horace. In Epodes and Satires the boundaries between categories
(like gender, age, subject) are liquid and permeable. The Odes project a well
systematized world with clear categories separated by fixed boundaries (Oliensis
1998). Nevertheless, the desire to stabilize a group identity and attempts at keeping
possible intruders outside are very much present in the Satires. Satire 1.9 narrates a
city encounter with a person, traditionally described as the “Pest”, who wants to
join the circle of Maecenas, referred to by the narrator (or ‘Horace’) as us. The

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poem makes a clear differentiation between that outsider and those belonging to the
group, which is not national and only partly social. This differentiation between us
and them is made inside the Roman elite tradition; the notions of urbanitas and
rusticitas describe separate groups of those who adhere to a code of behaviour of the
city and those who do not. Urbane does not necessarily mean or imply urban; no
difference can be detected in attitudes towards the local Roman or Latin members of
the group, and those of other Italian ethnicity. Maecenas himself was Etruscan, in
fact. Moreover, in Satire 1.5, which narrates the adventures of a city circle when
travelling in the countryside towards the Eastern coast of Italy, the first companion
mentioned is Greek.

This suggests that the elite circle, to which the protagonist of the satire claims to
belong, can be described as cosmopolitan. And a closer look at the short satire 1.7
might strengthen the impression that the satirical text tends to subvert the traditional
categories of Roman, Latin or alien. The introduction says that the story, which
follows, is “known to all the blind men and barbers,”¹² in other words, to everybody.
The oral genre of the anecdote about a witty repartee, frequently retold by the people
waiting in barbershops or at the chemist’s, explains why something known to
everybody should be narrated in a satire. The sub-genre is based on the witty riposte,
and a parallel in high literature might be the sixth day of Boccaccio’s Decameron with
the shortest novellas of the collection on “persons, who by some witty words (when
any have checkt or retorting them) have revenged Themselves, in a sudden,
unexpected and discreet answere, thereby preventing losse, danger, scorn and
disgrace, retorting Them on the busi-Headed questioners.”¹³ The main part of the
satire describes the two protagonists (the litigants) in the manner of epic parody,
which, however, concludes with a degrading metaphor that those warriors are actually
a pair of gladiators who will entertain the public. The gladiator spectacles represent
another typical city pastime, not unlike the barbershop gossip evoked above.

One of the litigants, Persius, is first called hybrida (i.e. mongrel), then a Greek.
Such terms separate him from the group of pure-blooded Romans. In addition he is
said to be rich in line 4 (running great business in Clazomenae), and the same
adjective is applied to the province Asia governed by Brutus (line 19). The
proverbial Eastern riches also associate him with Asia. That is why riches do not
result in superiority over the opponent Rupilius Rex, who had been proscribed, i.e.,
deprived of his wealth and rights in Italy. As a Roman, and as friend and attendant
of the Roman praetor, Rupilius Rex has a position superior to that of the half
Roman, Greek, Asian subjugated alien.¹⁴ What kind of rhetorical strategy can

¹²FL01 I quote the 1836 translation by C. Smart and A. Buckley, which can be found at http://www.
¹²FL03 Lippus does not exactly mean blind, rather somebody having chronic conjunctivitis, like ‘Horace’ in
¹²FL04 Sat 1.5,30.
¹³FL01 Translation attributed to John Florio, published in 1620 by the London publisher Iaggard.
¹⁴FL01 In Henderson’s interpretation both parties are members of Brutus’ entourage (1994, p. 161), and
¹⁴FL02 Brutus has a difficult choice between Rupilius, a “martyr of the Republican Cause” (165) and “Mr.
¹⁴FL03 Moneybag” (161), representing a group, of which the financial support is vitally important for the
¹⁴FL04 campaign (166).
Persius apply in such circumstances? He delivers a pompous laudation of Brutus and his cohort in Asiatic sonority (Henderson 1994, p. 159), emphasizing that Rupilius Rex is the only exception, the one and only harmful person among the Romans. The reaction of the audience is referred to by an ambiguous sentence: *Persius exponit causam ridetur ab omni conuentu* (22–23). If it means “Persius explains the case, and the whole audience was laughing at him,” it represents the indefensible situation of the nationally inferior litigant. The public, in which Brutus’ cohort obviously has a basic influence, has gathered to be amused, and they laugh at the alien as soon as he opens his mouth. The same sentence, however, can be interpreted another way too: “Persius explains the case, and the whole public was laughing,” in which case the audience laughs because what Persius says is funny: following his witty guidance, the audience would laugh at Rupilius Rex.\(^\text{15}\)

The setting is a city, to be sure; not Rome, but a big Hellenic town in Asia. When Persius describes the harmful nature of his opponent, the exclusive city context starts being undermined, and the discourse starts to be connected to the countryside. Such hints are rather weak at the beginning. First we are given a system of astronomic metaphors, in which Brutus is the Sun, his followers are healthy stars, but Rex is the Dog, which is a star farmers hate (*inuisum agricolis sidus*). Probably there are not too many farmers in the audience. The sequences of metaphors create an opportunity to insult the opponent (“you dog!”) in the form of a sophisticated punch line. It is nothing more but a metaphor identifying Rupilius with a star that is dangerous for farmers, since it brings extreme heat and dryness. What seems remarkable is that Persius’ pun is really witty. And this is not only my evaluation; the narrator, too, uses the word *salsus* (which more or less means ‘witty’) to describe it. In the previous passages the narrator suggested that the litigants are of the same kind, one is six, the other half a dozen. Here, however, they are contrasted: one is devastating summer heat, while the other is winter flood. Both are represented as destructive, but also as of completely different character.

From that point on, Rupilius Rex appears both literally and metaphorically as a countryman. He is denominated as ‘Praenestinus’. It is rather probable that the great majority of Italian towns were at least once said to be inhabited by yokels in comparison to Rome, but Praeneste is almost (proverbially) such a place. The remnants of archaic literature suggest that Romans of the period regarded the cuisine, the pronunciation of Latin and the fondness for boasting in Praeneste the most disgusting of all places (Ramage 1973, pp. 32–34, 47–49).\(^\text{16}\) According to the new metaphor, which is created by the narrator and not by an actor, Rupilius is a vine-dresser, and a tough one. His speech is not quoted in the poem; only this metaphor of a vine-dresser quarrelling with a traveller hints at his style. The contrasts, however, are hard. Persius’ speech is said to be fluent and witty, while what Rupilius says is simply *convicia*, i.e. ‘abuse’. In line 32 the litigants are contrasted as Greek and Italian: *At Graecus postquam est Italo perfusus aceto—*

\(^{15}\text{I do think that the ambiguity itself has its poetic merits here. Students of Horace, however, tend to find it necessary to take a stand, like in the quotation that follows: “I take ‘ridetur’ in the impersonal sense defended by Bernardi Perini […] contra Buchheit” (Plaza 2006, p. 64).}\n
\(^{16}\text{For boasting in Praeneste see Plautus *Bacch.* 12: Praenestinum opino esse, ita erat gloriosus.}\n
\(^{15}\text{FL01}\)

\(^{16}\text{FL01}\)

\(^{15}\text{FL02}\)

\(^{16}\text{FL02}\)
'After the Italian vinegar was poured all over the Greek’. But what kind of vinegar dresser produces only vinegar? In the punch line Persius hits back, addressing the judge: “O Brutus, by the great gods I conjure you, who are accustomed to take off kings, why do you not dispatch this King? Believe me, this is a piece of work which of right belongs to you.” This pun is based on the knowledge of Roman history and genealogy, not to mention that of the Latin language. Persius is referred to as Greek, but he knows that Brutus has the same name as and claims to be a descendant of that Brutus who expelled the kings from Rome and established the republic; he also knows that this is the ideological background of legitimizing Brutus’ act of killing Caesar as tyrannicide (Henderson 1994, passim). He delivers a characteristically Roman, urbane joke. And this is not only my personal impression; Pomponius Porhyrio, who wrote a commentary on Horace in the second or third century, started his entry about the given place by declaring it a highly urbane joke (Urbanissimus iocus). This urbane character of the joke, however, is not meant to be an evaluation. It might be a “bad pun” (Anderson 1982, p. 80), or “not bad” (Rudd 1982, p. 65), and it is probable that the closure of an anecdote cannot be evaluated in itself, since it has only contextual value (Henderson 1994, p. 157). One thing is certain: this pun was not tasteless, since it was very much in the mood of the first century BCE to make fun both of the word rex (van Rooy 1971, p. 81) and the cognomina of others (Matthews 1973). The master of urbanitas, Cicero also made fun of the name Marcus Rex (Ad Att. 1.16.10). In the contemporary dichotomy of urbanitas/rusticitas, Persius’ pun obviously belonged to the realm of urbanitas. The categories seem liquid at the end. A Greek behaves as a perfect citizen of Rome, while the Roman appears as not belonging to the city of Rome, only to Italy, to Praeneste, a provincial town; he appears as a countryman, a ‘rusticus’. The representation of category confusion is characteristic of satire, which, however, does not mean that the satire’s attitude towards this confusion is affirmative. The problem with the pest in Satires 1.9 is that he wants to belong to a circle (or category) without due qualifications, which can be measured by the mastery of a code of behaviour. The process of measuring seems to be a facet of almost every activity of the Roman elite. In that satire, a friend, Aristius Fuscus, encounters ‘Horace’ and the pest, and the protagonist asks for his help to get rid of the uncomfortable companion. Aristius makes fun of him by intentionally misunderstanding the requests. Not giving a hand does not cause any problem, since group identity or even solidarity is reinforced through “stylistic” teasing—each of the other. Moreover, it is a style to which the pest has no access: Aristius and Horace are playing a game that only the two of them understand, and the third party witnesses it without even realizing it is a game.

17FL01 Although the narrator takes his revenge by calling Aristius Fuscus male salsus (line 65). This male usually functions as privative, and therefore the expression might mean that the friend did not behave urbanely this time. But in Catull’s poem 10, which is in many aspects a model for this satire, a girl is called insulsa male, which evidently does not mean ‘very urbane’, but ‘inurbane in a malicious way’ (line 33). In my opinion, Horace’s male salsus also means ‘using his urbanity in a malicious way’ (as Smart and Buckley put it: “cruelly arch”); if so, it does not deny that Aristius’ behavior was urbane, it only emphasizes that this time the narrator-protagonist did not really like this kind of urbanity.
The categories of Roman, Italian, urbane, and alien seem to be well defined in the represented world, which, in its ideal state, is not supposed to experience confusions or trespassing. However, as soon as the categories are attached to acting characters within a story or entities of a text, they cannot sustain their conceptual purity, and the very notions start to be challenged by interferences. Readers, however, seem to be invited to explain or activate such potential of the satirical text, since in the world of satire all the declarations appear as double-coded. Everything is said as if by actors on a stage, and one must wonder whether it is the author’s authentic intention or a form of ridicule. And even if the actor seems more or less one with the author, he is never to be taken completely seriously.

References


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