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3 The betrayal of the satirical text

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

21

22 **Keywords** Satire · Horace · *Satires* 1.7 · Dialogism · Juvenal

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24 Juvenal's third satire contains a series of terribly xenophobic utterances that make
25 many readers of today feel uncomfortable. Recent interpreters of the text tend to
26 emphasize, however, that the unacceptable ideas are not uttered by the poet directly,
27 but by a character of the scene staged in the satire. He is called Vmbrius, whom the
28 poet (another character in the mini-drama) quotes. Significantly, the poet cites only
29 his farewell speech, and does not seem to agree with him completely. And even if he

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30 did, Vmbrius is not represented as a clear-minded figure of exemplary morals;
 31 therefore readers should not accept his ideas. They are rather supposed to criticize
 32 the stupidities this stupid character puts forth (Braund 1988, pp. 11–15; Hooley
 33 2007, pp. 117–118; see also Staley 2000).

34 Satires make quite frequent use of second grade speakers. Or perhaps the satirical
 35 speaker should always be regarded as a second grade speaker. Even if he is not
 36 given a name different from that of the author, we can suppose that he is playing a
 37 role on an imaginary stage (Braund 1996).¹ The *persona* of this satirical speaker and
 38 the implied author should be differentiated. Let us suppose that the text is aware of
 39 staging a disagreeable person, then we can conclude that it does not expect the
 40 readers to be as indignant as the speaker is, but, rather, to laugh at the speaker. In
 41 such interpretations the satirical *persona* is regarded as an *alazon*, to use Northrop
 42 Frye's terminology (Frye 1957, p. 172).² He is a boasting, impertinent figure,
 43 running everybody down, while being at least as ridiculous as the target of his
 44 criticism.

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

1FL01 ¹ For the theatrical (aspect, theme, character, topic?) in the satire see especially Keane (2006), pp. 13–41.

2FL01 ² It must be emphasised that we are only making use of Frye's terminology, while in his analysis of "the
 2FL02 mythos of winter: irony and satire" the option of the satirist as an *alazon* never appears, while he
 2FL03 mentions that *alazons* are frequently attacked in and by satires: "the satirist may employ a plain,
 2FL04 common-sense, conventional person as a foil for the various *alazons* of society. Such a person may be the
 2FL05 author himself or a narrator" (Frye 1957, p. 226).

69 speaker Vmbricius and the satirical persona as problematic or ridiculous. But does
70 that make the xenophobic discourse unreal or non-credible?

71 In the sixth poem of his first book of satires, Horace appears to narrate his
72 personal life history. The speaker seems to do his very best to create the impression
73 that he is identical to the poet. He speaks of his father, the calamities of his early
74 life, and his friendship with Maecenas. For centuries it was easily accepted as a
75 completely honest autobiography. It became a commonplace in the 20th century that
76 self-representation is not identical with the self; therefore “honesty” is neither
77 accepted nor looked for in a poem any more.³ In this particular poem Horace
78 declares three times that his father was a freedman.⁴ This declaration of the family’s
79 social status became one of the most fixed biographical details in Roman literary
80 histories ever.

81 Since the publication of a paper by Gordon Williams, however, many scholars
82 treat this “fact” with doubt or simply declare that it is not true.⁵ The suspicion
83 comes from its apparent incompatibility with some other biographical data: the
84 father figure in the same poem does not show any trait of a (forced) immigrant and
85 the obviously expensive education provided to his son suggested some conservative
86 and definitely Italian persuasion. But, above all, Horace’s role in the civil war as a
87 *tribunus militum*, as far as we know, could not be played by the son of a slave. Some
88 doubt may be appropriate, but how can we deny an explicit and twice repeated
89 declaration of the poet himself? The argument is based exactly on the literal
90 repetition, and the context. The speaker is Horace here, but he is said to be quoting
91 some detractors, as if saying, “that is the name some people are calling me; do you
92 see how absurd it is?”⁶ Williams elaborated a rather plausible hypothesis to explain
93 why people could call Horace the son of a freedman if he was not. His father might
94 have been involved in the Social War against Rome, and after the capture of
95 Venusia he was possibly sold among other captives for a shorter period as a
96 punishment. The story is rather satisfactory: if it is true, Horace’s father was not a
97 real slave, but it explains where the idea could have come from. Unfortunately the
98 hypothesis cannot be proved. What is important, however, is not why people called
99 Horace a freedman’s son (if they did), but the convincing suggestion that the
100 passage should be interpreted as quoting others’ utterances instead of being a direct
101 utterance by the autobiographical speaker.

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

3FL01 ³ At least when a critic has basic theoretical training.

4FL01 ⁴ *Sat.* 1.6,6, 1.6,45, and 1.6,46.

5FL01 ⁵ To be exact, doubt was expressed also before Williams’ paper, see e.g. White (1982), p. 52. The
5FL02 question is not settled at all. While the cliché of the freedman father can be found in many recent
5FL03 publications (e.g. Keane 2006, pp. 106, 109), a new survey of Roman satire formulates the problem as
5FL04 follows: “His father was, according to Horace (1.6), a freedman, but it is likely he was never a slave in the
5FL05 traditional sense” (Hooley 2007, p. 29).

6FL01 ⁶ The second place (Nunc ad me redeo, libertino patre natum / quem rodunt omnes libertino patre natum.)
6FL02 was translated by C. Smart and Th. Buckley as follows: “Now I return to myself, who am descended from
6FL03 a freedman; whom every body nibbles at, as being descended from a freed-man.” According to the recent,
6FL04 skeptical interpretation it would be: “Now I return to myself, who am ‘descended from a freedman’;
6FL05 whom everybody nibbles at, as if I were descended from a freedman.”



104 It goes without saying that I do not regard the above interpretations as wrong or
 105 invalid. However, if the general approach to a satirical text is to challenge the
 106 obviously offered meaning by undermining the reliability of the message as uttered
 107 by a less than convincing speaker, does a satirical writer ever have a chance to be
 108 taken seriously if he wants to say something uncomfortable? This is, of course, a
 109 rhetorical question. Seemingly it scrutinizes the author's intention, but actually it
 110 does not. My intention is not to defend the authors' right to advertise ideas I do not
 111 accept. And I do not complain because authors have no means to supervise readers
 112 and fix the interpretation of their texts. I would rather like to highlight a feature of
 113 the satirical text, namely that it creates a context for practically every utterance in
 114 which it can be, or—as a rule—is undermined. When I speak of the betrayal of the
 115 satirical text I do not mean that the satirical text betrays its author (maybe it does,
 116 depriving them of their authority through the very act of textualisation), but that it
 117 betrays its own utterances.

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

137 The problem seems to cover an even wider area if we consider it in the context of
 138 the dialogic nature of literary communication or even language. Students of Mikhail
 139 Bakhtin's oeuvre tend to be puzzled by the question of whether dialogism is a
 140 general characteristic of human utterances or rather a great achievement of
 141 novelistic discourse, especially the novels by Dostoevsky. In his book *Problems of*
 142 *Dostoevsky's poetics*, Bakhtin seems to imply that most novels are not really of
 143 dialogic nature, and Dostoevsky is the great exception. The first version of his
 144 Dostoevsky book was published in 1929, but in his 1934–35 essay "Discourse in the
 145 novel" he already argued that the novel as such is dialogic, while poetic language is
 146 always and by its nature monologic.⁷ His analysis of dialogism, however, is so

7FL01 ⁷ See especially the chapter "Discourse in poetry and discourse in the novel" (Bakhtin 1981,
 7FL02 pp. 275–300).

147 convincing that one can hardly imagine how a non-dialogic poetic discourse is even
 148 possible. Be that as it may, if “the way in which the word conceives its objects
 149 complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of
 150 its socio-verbal intellegibility,” and any image of any object “may be penetrated by
 151 this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it” (Bakhtin
 152 1981, p. 277), the satirical utterances are also voiced in a dialogic space where an
 153 extreme opinion may not only remind us of various other opinions (uttered by
 154 different social groups), but implies them, since it is conceived as a response to
 155 them. A reader taking a position against the explicit utterance may perform a
 156 legitimate act in the dialogic play inscribed in and activated by the word.⁸

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

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

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

8FL01 ⁸ The idea that speakers cannot even remotely control their utterances, since the language is
 8FL02 uncontrollable, has been famously formulated by Martin Heidegger: “Die Sprache spricht nicht der
 8FL03 Mensch. Der Mensch spricht nur, indem er geschicklich der Sprache entspricht” (Heidegger 1957,
 8FL04 p. 161).

9FL01 ⁹ On my concerns about irony see Hajdu (2007).

10FL01 ¹⁰ http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Poe's_Law (Accessed 29. 10. 2012).



187 discourse makes it is also possible that the “Other” speaks as the main speaker of
 188 the text, the satirical persona. And undermining the speaker’s authority may be a
 189 useful device, through which “the satirist can both say ‘the speaker’s statement’ and
 190 un-say it” (Plaza 2006, p. 4). His authority is usually undermined by some general
 191 tensions of the speaker’s personality and the way the ridiculed material is presented,
 192 since he boasts that he is telling the plain truth, but extensively manipulates his
 193 material; he claims to hate vice, but is always looking for it; his merciless attacks
 194 challenge his alleged probity; he combines self-righteousness with aggressive
 195 criticism, which suggests he is an egoistic monster.¹¹ If such tensions are encoded in
 196 the satirical discourse, it is hardly surprising that all the utterances can be
 197 undermined by the interpretation and that the satirical text betrays its explicit
 198 statements. In the following parts of this paper, however, I will not discuss a text of
 199 easily deconstructable persona, but rather the uncontrollable implications of a
 200 seemingly simple act of story-telling.

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

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

222 Sometimes it is said that there is an immense difference between the early and
 223 later poetry of Horace. In *Epodes* and *Satires* the boundaries between categories
 224 (like gender, age, subject) are liquid and permeable. The *Odes* project a well
 225 systematized world with clear categories separated by fixed boundaries (Oliensis
 226 1998). Nevertheless, the desire to stabilize a group identity and attempts at keeping
 227 possible intruders outside are very much present in the *Satires*. Satire 1.9 narrates a
 228 city encounter with a person, traditionally described as the “Pest”, who wants to
 229 join the circle of Maecenas, referred to by the narrator (or ‘Horace’) as *us*. The

11FL01 ¹¹ I refer to Maria Plaza’s summary of Alvin Kernan’s ideas (Plaza 2006, p. 25, cf. Kernan 1959,
 11FL02 pp. 1–30).

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

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

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

12FL01 ¹² I quote the 1836 translation by C. Smart and A. Buckley, which can be found at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0063%3Abook%3D1%3Apoem%3D7>.
 12FL02
 12FL03 Lippus does not exactly mean blind, rather somebody having chronic conjunctivitis, like ‘Horace’ in
 12FL04 *Sat 1.5,30*.

13FL01 ¹³ Translation attributed to John Florio, published in 1620 by the London publisher Iaggard.
 13FL02 <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/boccaccio/giovanni/b664d/>.

14FL01 ¹⁴ 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).



266 Persius apply in such circumstances? He delivers a pompous laudation of Brutus
 267 and his cohort in Asiatic sonority (Henderson 1994, p. 159), emphasizing that
 268 Rupilius Rex is the only exception, the one and only harmful person among the
 269 Romans. The reaction of the audience is referred to by an ambiguous sentence:
 270 *Persius exponit causam ridetur ab omni conuentu* (22–23). If it means “Persius
 271 explains the case, and the whole audience was laughing at him,” it represents the
 272 indefensible situation of the nationally inferior litigant. The public, in which Brutus’
 273 cohort obviously has a basic influence, has gathered to be amused, and they laugh at
 274 the alien as soon as he opens his mouth. The same sentence, however, can be
 275 interpreted another way too: “Persius explains the case, and the whole public was
 276 laughing,” in which case the audience laughs because what Persius says is funny:
 277 following his witty guidance, the audience would laugh at Rupilius Rex.¹⁵

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

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

15FL01 ¹⁵ I do think that the ambiguity itself has its poetic merits here. Students of Horace, however, tend to find
 15FL02 it necessary to take a stand, like in the quotation that follows: “I take ‘ridetur’ in the impersonal sense
 15FL03 defended by Bernardi Perini [...] *contra* Buchheit” (Plaza 2006, p. 64).

16FL01 ¹⁶ For boasting in Praeneste see Plautus *Bacch.* 12: Praenestinum opino esse, ita erat gloriosus.

307 ‘After the Italian vinegar was poured all over the Greek’. But what kind of vine-
308 dresser produces only vinegar?

309 In the punch line Persius hits back, addressing the judge: “O Brutus, by the great
310 gods I conjure you, who are accustomed to take off kings, why do you not dispatch
311 this King? Believe me, this is a piece of work which of right belongs to you.” This
312 pun is based on the knowledge of Roman history and genealogy, not to mention that
313 of the Latin language. Persius is referred to as Greek, but he knows that Brutus has
314 the same name as and claims to be a descendant of that Brutus who expelled the
315 kings from Rome and established the republic; he also knows that this is the
316 ideological background of legitimizing Brutus’ act of killing Caesar as tyrannicide
317 (Henderson 1994, *passim*). He delivers a characteristically Roman, urbane joke.
318 And this is not only my personal impression; Pomponius Porphyrio, who wrote a
319 commentary on Horace in the second or third century, started his entry about the
320 given place by declaring it a highly urbane joke (*Vrbanissimus iocus*). This urbane
321 character of the joke, however, is not meant to be an evaluation. It might be a “bad
322 pun” (Anderson 1982, p. 80), or “not bad” (Rudd 1982, p. 65), and it is probable
323 that the closure of an anecdote cannot be evaluated in itself, since it has only
324 contextual value (Henderson 1994, p. 157). One thing is certain: this pun was not
325 tasteless, since it was very much in the mood of the first century BCE to make fun
326 both of the word *rex* (van Rooy 1971, p. 81) and the cognomina of others (Matthews
327 1973). The master of *urbanitas*, Cicero also made fun of the name Marcius Rex (*Ad
328 Att.* 1.16.10). In the contemporary dichotomy of *urbanitas/rusticitas*, Persius’ pun
329 obviously belonged to the realm of *urbanitas*.

330 The categories seem liquid at the end. A Greek behaves as a perfect citizen of
331 Rome, while the Roman appears as not belonging to the city of Rome, only to Italy,
332 to Praeneste, a provincial town; he appears as a countryman, a ‘*rusticus*’.

333 The representation of category confusion is characteristic of satire, which,
334 however, does not mean that the satire’s attitude towards this confusion is
335 affirmative. The problem with the pest in *Satires* 1.9 is that he wants to belong to a
336 circle (or category) without due qualifications, which can be measured by the
337 mastery of a code of behaviour. The process of measuring seems to be a facet of
338 almost every activity of the Roman elite. In that satire, a friend, Aristius Fuscus,
339 encounters ‘Horace’ and the pest, and the protagonist asks for his help to get rid of
340 the uncomfortable companion. Aristius makes fun of him by intentionally
341 misunderstanding the requests. Not giving a hand does not cause any problem,
342 since group identity or even solidarity is reinforced through “stylistic” teasing—
343 each of the other.¹⁷ Moreover, it is a style to which the pest has no access: Aristius
344 and Horace are playing a game that only the two of them understand, and the third
345 party witnesses it without even realizing it is a game.

17FL01 ¹⁷ Although the narrator takes his revenge by calling Aristius Fuscus *male salsus* (line 65). This *male*
17FL02 usually functions as privative, and therefore the expression might mean that the friend did not behave
17FL03 urbanely this time. But in Catull’s poem 10, which is in many aspects a model for this satire, a girl is
17FL04 called *insulsa male*, which evidently does not mean ‘very urbane’, but ‘inurbane in a malicious way’ (line
17FL05 33). In my opinion, Horace’s *male salsus* also means ‘using his urbanity in a malicious way’ (as Smart
17FL06 and Buckley put it: “cruelly arch”); if so, it does not deny that Aristius’ behavior was urbane, it only
17FL07 emphasizes that this time the narrator-protagonist did not really like this kind of urbanity.



346 The categories of Roman, Italian, urbane, and alien seem to be well defined in the
 347 represented world, which, in its ideal state, is not supposed to experience confusions
 348 or trespassing. However, as soon as the categories are attached to acting characters
 349 within a story or entities of a text, they cannot sustain their conceptual purity, and
 350 the very notions start to be challenged by interferences. Readers, however, seem to
 351 be invited to explain or activate such potential of the satirical text, since in the world
 352 of satire all the declarations appear as double-coded. Everything is said as if by
 353 actors on a stage, and one must wonder whether it is the author's authentic intention
 354 or a form of ridicule. And even if the actor seems more or less one with the author,
 355 he is never to be taken completely seriously.
 356

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