Introduction: Roman satire

Origins: Lucilius

Near the beginning of the tenth book of his Institutes, midway through a list of readings recommended for the orator in training, Quintilian, Rome’s most prolific theorist of rhetoric after Cicero, takes a tendentious step towards satire’s terrain by claiming that this particular genre can be accounted “totally ours.”¹ The claim is tendentious because extreme, and true only in a highly qualified sense. For ancient critics had long since sought to establish the genre’s Greek pedigree by tracing its development past its most obvious early practitioners in Republican Rome (Ennius and Lucilius, both of whom wrote in the second century BCE) all the way to fifth-century Athens. Claims of satire’s Greek provenience, although they could easily be stretched to an opposite extreme, are defensible and seem to have at least some narrow basis in fact.

Horace, writing more than one hundred years before Quintilian, was aware of both extremes. Perhaps to goad those in his audience who adamantly defended the idea that satire sprouted entirely from Roman soil, but perhaps also to mimic those who wanted to believe that any good thing in Roman literature just had to come from the Greeks, Horace went so far as to assert that Lucilius did not a whit more to invent satire than to rework the meters of Greek Old Comedy (“having changed only their meters and rhythms,” mutatis tantum pedibus numerisque, Sermones 1.4.7). Referring to Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Cratinus, the three canonical comedians of fifth-century Athens, Horace says “Lucilius relies on them entirely” (hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, Sermones 1.4.6).² So much for satire’s being at all “ours,” let alone “totally” so.

¹ For Quintilian on satire, see Institutes 10.1.93–5. The difficulties surrounding the claim satura quidem tota nostra est are neatly summarized by Hendrickson (1927).
² These sentiments have long been regarded by commentators as suspiciously overdone; see, for example, Rudd (1966) 89. I suspect that such patent exaggerations sample and send up the hard-line views of certain of Horace’s critics; see Freudenburg (2001) 18–19. That such
Actually, when Quintilian makes his famous claim, just a few years before the publication of Juvenal’s first book, he does not say *satura tota nostra est* ("satire is totally ours"), although he is often quoted that way. He says *satura quidem tota nostra est* ("satire at least/if nothing else is totally ours"). His particularizing and emphatic *quidem* matters, for it is emotionally charged; a way of breathing a sigh of relief, midway inside a long list of Roman generic enterprises, all modeled after Greek precedents, themselves reviewed earlier in the same book, and saying “here, for once, and just this once, we Romans have something, at least this one thing that we can claim as our own and *not* derived from the Greeks.” That is the fuller tale told by Quintilian’s not-so-innocent *quidem*. It announces that we are now inside a pleasant myth, *tota nostra est*, one that was taken very seriously in some sectors, it seems, already a century and a half before in Horace’s day. And clearly there were critics in Quintilian’s day, too, who took the basic gist of this assertion a good deal more seriously than he himself did. For before he can make any significant headway into his discussion of satire’s best practitioners and habits at *Institutes* 10.1.93 Quintilian must first dispute the rankings of certain critics who, still in his own day, stubbornly maintained (he is annoyed with them) that Lucilius was not just Rome’s first writer of satire, and a very fine one at that, but Rome’s greatest writer of all time, in all genres – not Ennius, not Horace, not Virgil: Lucilius!

Failing to make Quintilian’s list in the late first century CE is Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE), the poet usually accounted Rome’s first writer of satire. Best known to us as the author of the *Annales*, Rome’s finest national epic before the *Aeneid*, he is well represented in a number of genres where he merits mention by Quintilian as an author worthy of study. The great majority of these poetic enterprises Ennius modeled directly after Greek precedents. But in among his lesser-known efforts there have survived a few scant remains of a four-book collection of poems that he entitled *saturae*. That title, the plural form of Latin *satura*, is unknown before Ennius, and has been the subject of much debate. Apparently it derives from the Latin adjective *satur*, meaning “chock-full.”

Exaggerations could actually rate as respectable theory in certain sectors (especially, it seems, among Greek scholars working in Rome) can be seen from the comments of Porphyrio and Pseudacron ad *Sermones* 1.10.66, where both claim that satire lacks a Greek precedent only in the sense that no Greek had written it in hexameter verse. Both scholiasts are quick to point out that Roman satire’s hexameter scheme is itself a Greek metrical invention. Quintilian ranks Ennius among Rome’s best writers of epic at *Inst*. 10.1.88. His tragedies do not make Quintilian’s preferred list, but they are cited for critical comment (sometimes positively) on several occasions.

For various possibilities, see Knoche (1975) 7–16.
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It seems, then, that Ennius used the term to designate his poems as things chock-full of this and that ("miscellanies"), for what little remains of them (a mere thirty-one lines of verse) suggests that they have far more in common with collections of Hellenistic occasional poems, such as Posidippus’ grab-bag of epigrams known as Soros, “The Pile,” or Ennius’ own Hedyphagetica, “Delicatessen,” than they do with the later poems of Lucilius and Horace that go by the same name.5 For this reason it is perhaps best not to refer to them as “satires” at all. That is their title, but not really their genre. Satire, in that sense, “our” sense, had yet to be invented.

Quintilian knew of the existence of these pre-Lucilian “satires.”6 But he carefully sidesteps mentioning them in his review of satire by claiming that “Lucius was the first to achieve distinction” in satire. Not, in other words, the first to write satire, but the first to do it well. This is in keeping with Horace, who had named Lucilius his chief predecessor in the genre (Sermones 1.4 passim), even calling him satire’s inuentor “discoverer/innovator” (Sermones 1.10.48), and “the one who first dared to compose poems in this manner” (Sermones 2.1.62–3), even though he, too, was certainly aware that, in addition to Lucilius, “certain others” (quibusdam aliis, Sermones 1.10.47) had preceded him in satire.7 Like Quintilian, he does not think they merit mentioning by name. For Horace, Ennius is an epic poet, linked to satire as a frequent target, never as a writer of satires.

Later scholars, such as Porphyrio in the second century and Diomedes in the fourth, are less reticent about Ennius’ role in the history of Roman satire.8 Although they make explicit room for Ennius (and for his nephew Pacuvius, also a writer of saturae in the Ennian manner, not a line of which survives) in their studies of satire, they are always quick to draw a hard and

5 Gratwick (1982) lays out the Hellenistic background of Ennius’ four Saturae. See also Muecke in this volume.
6 He cites Ennius in satura at Inst. 9.2.36.
7 Horace, S. 1.10.66 makes reference to an author of purely indigenous Latin poems. Though the reference is best taken as generic (“an author”) rather than specific (definitely not Ennius, see Fedeli (1994) 524–5), the description of these poems as Graecis intacti lets us hear what is at stake in the world of contemporary satire criticism. The phrase is politically loaded, implying not just that the poetry in question was “untold” by the Greeks, but that it was “unspoiled/untainted” by them. I suspect that in the phrase Graecis intacti the poet adopts a momentary, “deviant” point of focalization. In essence he is quoting his critics (without the benefit of quotation marks) to send up one of their favorite ideas, that of the pure Roman essence that precedes, and is undone by, the Greek. On deviant focalizers generally, see Fowler (2000) 40–61.
8 Porphyrio mentions both Ennius and Pacuvius among the “certain others” who preceded Horace in the writing of satire at Horace, S. 1.10.47, and he names Ennius with Lucilius and Varro as writers of saturae in his introduction to Epistles 1.3.
The great divide here, as in every account of satire's history in Rome, is Lucilius. Before him, the story goes, the genre existed in a certain Ur-fashion, and it possessed certain elements that it would retain throughout its history, such as variety, comic situations, and low diction, fables, autobiography, lively dialogue, and so on. But it did not have the basic elements that Lucilius permanently attached to the genre as its most pronounced and consistent features: namely, personal abuse and social criticism. Such innovations, Diomedes suggests, did not spring fully armed from Lucilius' head, but came to him by way of precedents in Greek Old Comedy. Obviously, this is to give the Greeks a good deal of credit for Roman satire. And yet, inside his reference to the genre as something practiced specifically apud Romanos we can detect telltale traces of an alternate ideal, that of the genre's being exception-ally and/or completely Roman. Or in Quintilian's words, "totally ours."

Quintilian wants us to believe this about satire, so he leaves Ennius and Pacuvius unmentioned. He has to. To include them in his account would severely compromise his idea (one that had been bandied about for more than a century) of the genre's Roman indigeneity, for this is an idea that cannot survive Ennius' notorious philhellenia, his status as a semigraecus ("half-Greek"), and the fact that his literary career focused so heavily on adapting Greek literary precedents (especially epic, tragedy, comedy) into matching Latin forms. In the end, if this genre is to be defended as entirely Roman, that defense has to be put in terms of what Lucilius did to it, not how Ennius first developed it.

But the problem of satire's being unproblematically Roman, whether we take Quintilian's deeming it "entirely ours" to refer to the genre's origins or to its developed habits, is not simply a matter of specific social desires having inched their way into the criticism of satire from the outside. Rather, the overstatement of the genre's Romanness is a direct consequence of the way that satire was made to speak by Lucilius, and the social and political uses to which he put it. For Lucilius' genre-chartering performance (his thirty books of satires) is, from start to finish, an aggressive overstatement of what it means to be a genuine Roman in second-century Rome. His performance is, in great measure, deeply conditioned by a crisis in Roman identity that
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came with Rome’s second-century economic and imperial successes, especially its subjugation of Greece, and the city’s wholesale “translation” of Greek cultural materials and habits into the lives of the Roman elite. And it is from within that rapidly globalizing cultural milieu, with so much burgeoning Roman invention consisting of rapid “translation” from the Greek, that Lucilius “first dares” to impress his audience with his being comfortable in his own, home-made, south Italian shoes. As Fritz Graf points out in his contribution to this volume, rapidly giving way to forces of modernization (= Hellenization) in this period are certain traditional instruments of social control that the Roman upper classes had long employed to shame themselves into behaving properly. Lucilius’ brand of extra-legal verbal violence may well have drawn on certain of these dying, and utterly Roman, institutions (especially that of conuicium facere) to produce a voice skeptical of the law, capable of judging for itself, and full of regret for the loss of native values and old Roman ways. It is precisely this manner of angry nostalgia for all that has been lost that Juvenal will bring back to life in direct imitation of his preferred model, Lucilius.

However much his satires may owe to the Greeks, and that is demonstrably quite a lot, and however Hellenized and high-brow Lucilius may have been in his personal life, the overall impression his poems make is that of being proudly home born. Their romanitas explodes off the poet’s every page not by chance, but because that is largely their point, and how they mean to impress us. And that is one reason among many why the likes of Ennius and Pacuvius come in for such rough handling in these poems, and why, in turn, they get elided from so many ancient surveys of satire. Catherine Connors (in this volume) points out that allusions to epic are not mere decorative enhancements: they are ways of defining, and reflecting on, the poet’s political world. Lucilius parodies and pokes fun at Rome’s epic poets not just because they were famous, and wrote infelicitous lines of poetry from time to time, but because doing so establishes the speaker as an authentic, unmediated Roman, unimpressed by two of the hottest and best paid of the city’s second-century Hellenizers. Criticizing them, in other words, is not the point of Lucilian satire. It is a necessary means towards a different end: the performance of the poet’s free-speaking, rugged, and utterly Roman self. That performance speaks “the satirist” into existence (his first appearance

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10 On the satirists’ attitudes towards the law and legal institutions generally, see Marongiu (1977), Cloud (1980), Mazurek (1997), and McGinn (2001).
11 Lucilius parodies writers of tragedy (especially) on numerous occasions. For specific cases, see Marx (1904–1905) 100, Skutsch (1985) 11–12, and the index of Krenkel (1970), vol. ii, s.v. Ennius and Lucilius.
as such), marking him as “his own” creation in a vast sea of translations and imitations. And it structures criticism of satire for centuries to come, figuring it as a question of Roman self-possession, “ours” versus “theirs.”

But if, as I have suggested, the underlying question posed by Lucilius in his poems is “what have we Romans to say for ourselves anymore?” the answer he gives is the vehicle through which he puts the question: his satires. Both in their formal design and in their content, poems of “his” kind stand in sharp opposition to the Greek-inspired poems-for-hire of Ennius, Pacuvius, and their ilk. Much the same can be said for satire’s problematic relationship to the “alien wisdom” of Greek philosophy. Roland Mayer (in this volume) points out that Greek philosophical teachings, though ever present in Roman satire as materials that both structure and lend weight to the satirist’s ethical and political arguments, are just as commonly deployed for purposes of parody and ridicule. The satirist keeps his distance, warily regarding his relationship to Greek philosophy, as to Greek things generally, as one of “ours” versus “theirs.” But that should not deceive us. These poems, from Lucilius onwards, draw heavily on Greek precedents, especially diatribe, iambic poetry, and Greek Old Comedy. Many scholars, both ancient and modern, have seen this. Lucilius is demonstrably no hater of all things Greek. Rather, he plays one from time to time, as he has to, to place himself at a healthy, critical distance from his society’s philhellenic enthusiasms. His first satire of his first book (it may have been the entire first book) begins with what looks like a xenophobic rant, attacking not Greeks per se, but Roman enthusiasms for all things Greek. These enthusiasms, he has the gods in heaven complain, found Romans wearing underwear from Lydia and racing to buy up all sorts of gorgeous, Greek luxuries. Even the most mundane of practical items, mere lamps and bed-feet, were called by their Greek names, _luchnoi_ and _klinopodes_. The silliness and snobbery of it all sends the poet into a righteous Roman rage.

This poem is a genre-defining first act. Later satirists, most famously Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–CE 65) in his _Apocolocyntosis_, remind us of it repeatedly and programmatically, as if to demonstrate what they can and, more importantly, _cannot_ do while performing within Lucilius’ clearly marked terrain. This is a generic space that stubbornly resists being reoccupied, plowed under, or improved. Strangely, it remains always fundamentally _his_, guarded by Lucilius as if by the former owner’s jealous ghost (a nasty curmudgeon who does not take kindly to strangers).\(^{12}\) Each satirist after Lucilius, by

\(^{12}\) Hendrickson (1927) 54:

Early Roman literary theory, dealing not yet with a literary genus, but merely with the personality of Lucilius (character _Lucilianus_), emphasized in him his freedom and
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moving onto his terrain, is set with the challenge of speaking the way he once did. But none does. None can. Instead, by reminding us of the vast differences that separate Lucilius’ free-wheeling “then” from their own restricted “now,” Rome’s post-Lucilian satirists produce radically different senses of the Roman self, in versions of Romanness that speak to, send up, or otherwise (satirically or perfectly) suit the times in which they themselves live.\footnote{For example, Horace, in the first poem of his second book, tells of how Lucilius (again in that famous first satire) sank his teeth into the “Wolf,” L. Cornelius Lentulus Lupus, a consular senator and former censor, princeps senatus in 131–25 BCE, whose death is the occasion for the mock concilium deorum in Lucilius’ first book, later imitated by Seneca in his Apocolocyntosis, and Juvenal in his fourth satire. For satire’s subsequent imitations of this scene see Connors in this volume. Horace, in his turn, takes on foes of a different, less threatening type, the “Deer” (Cervius) and “Dog” (Canidia), to whom he hesitates to show his teeth (S. 2.1.39–49).}

Post-Lucilian poses: Horace, Persius, and others

Like Lucilius, Horace was a south Italian, by reputation independent and rough around the edges. He wrote poems about life in the Big City, dwelling especially on its characters, trials, and annoyances. His poems treat us to the perspective of an outsider looking in, someone not altogether impressed. They complain. They gossip and criticize. And, above all, they urge us to laugh. Resemblances between the two authors, for the most part, stop here. For as Emily Gowers indicates, Horace projects a far different sense of himself in his “Conversations” than Lucilius did in his searingly nasty satires. He speaks in softer, more cautious tones, telling us that he means well by his criticisms, that he intends only to tell the truth, and that no one need take offense. Satiric poems, he tells us, are a touchy business, and hard to get just right. Like party-goers, they are fun to be around, but they sometimes get out of line and make everyone cringe from embarrassment and fear.\footnote{See especially Horace, S. 1.4.81–9. Ruffell (2003) makes clear that these lines distinguish the practices of a politely conversational, Epicurean satirist (Horace’s own invention) from those of a Late Republican political lampooner in the traditions of Pitholaos, Calvus, and Catullus.} The way Lucilius did. Get them completely “soused” (another meaning of satur) and they turn nasty and belligerent, losing their feel for the finer qualities of irony, allusion, boldness of personal attack . . . when at a later time (in the early days of Horace) this character Lucilianus became generalized to cover the conception of a Roman satira, there came into the definition and idea of satire a notion of vehement personal attack which is in fact quite alien to all Roman satire subsequent to Lucilius. This point of view persisted curiously, so far as the name and theory are concerned, down to the latest times.
and fair play. But friends who are both direct in their criticisms and sensitive to the company at hand (besides being aware of their own deficiencies) comport themselves differently. They open up to one another in clever and revealing ways by drinking “just enough” (satis) and knowing when to stop.¹⁵

Horace’s introduction of bad characters (drunken, belligerent, malicious) into the theorizing of good satire draws heavily on Greek rhetorical theories that treat criticism and jest as matters of gentlemanly comportment.¹⁶ These theories insisted that jokes and critical jabs had to be used with utmost care because they were direct and open expressions of one’s nobility and worth. Certain men of high standing, operating within certain highly delimited, ritualized contexts – such as the orator in his peroration, or the censor in issuing his decrees – were expected to rail at vice and, when called for, to belittle and poke fun. Doing so spoke to the speaker’s innate nobility, and to his having the full legal wherewithal to practice a rite that few could access. But there were many others who practiced less savory brands of humor in the ancient Greco-Roman world: the pratfallers and facial contortionists of the mime stage, parasites in their cups, buffoons of farce, scandal-mongers and levelers of anonymous lampoons.¹⁷ These degraded sorts had served as handy points of reference for rhetorical theorists since Plato, helping to define the gentleman by way of what he was not: namely, the low-bred “other” who veers overboard in jest because he is by nature extreme, back-biting, licentious, and crass.¹⁸ Thomas Habinek points out that the satirist’s self-performance depends on his staging these figures, repeatedly and in bold

¹⁵ This is to apply Callimachean aesthetic principles to the writing of satire; see Hubbard (1981) and Dufallo (2000). It is also to apply the rules of the Greek symposium (and sympotic poetry) to the writing of satire. See Compton-Engle (1999) 346: “In sympotic poetry, the avoidance of polemical subjects is directly related to the desire to avoid drunken violence at the symposium itself.”


¹⁷ For Aristotle’s theory of the liberal jest, see especially Rhetoric 3.1439b2–9. Cicero’s rhetorical works are the most important source for the theory’s subsequent deployment in Rome. See especially De oratore 2.226–90, Orator 87–90, and De officiis 1.103–4. For the later development of these theories in eighteenth-century England (with special emphasis on print satire) see Donald (1996) 1–74.

¹⁸ Typical is Cicero, Orator 88: “the orator will use jest in a manner that is not too profuse, lest he come off as a buffoon. To avoid the mime actor’s role, he will avoid obscenity. Nor will he take relish in abuse, like a rogue, and he will not laugh at disaster, which is inhuman.” The citing of wicked and misguided humorists is deployed as a standard means of legitimation for satirists and theorists of satire from Horace’s picture of a tattling and malicious dinner-guest (S. 1.4.81–9) and Persius’ superficial satirist (lusco qui possit dicere “lusco” Persius 1.128) to Addison’s “circumforaneous wits” (Spectator no. 47 [1711], Richard Payne Knight’s “Pindars, Pasquins, sketchers and reviewers” (The Progress of Civil Society [1796]), and Pope’s “dark anonymous Writers . . . deeply immers’d in dirty work” (Dunciad [1729]) in
colors, as objects of ridicule, parody, and “play.” For to play with them this way is to articulate the satirist’s own sense of fair play. And that, Habinek insists, comes not from handbooks and literary traditions, but from social practices of long standing, mostly of a non-literary sort. Told this way, satire “belongs to the history of practices as well as to the history of texts,” and it can thus be studied as much for what it does (its social life, especially in the area of self-production) as for what it says.

Dovetailing with Habinek’s study of satire’s social life are Fritz Graf’s essay on satire’s ritual analogies (see above) and two studies of satire’s bodily rhetoric. In the first of these, Alessandro Barchiesi and Andrea Cucchiarelli look at how satirists figure their works in bodily terms, thereby inviting us to step into the role of amateur physician/satirist and, as it were, to read their works for signs of life. The satirist’s own body thereby becomes a shorthand for the values to which he holds, and a means for our envisioning his work as a set of bodily expressions. The second essay in this set, by Erik Gunderson, moves from the literary figuring of satire’s bodies to the psychic costs and benefits of watching them misbehave. So many bad characters, he shows, are caught in flagrante between satire’s permissive sheets. What is the point of their being staged for our viewing, especially when satirists offer no compensating models of bodily pleasures properly buttoned down? The point, Gunderson suggests, is not simply to define the sexual parameters of the élite Roman male and to declare him satire’s, and his society’s, regrettable winner – this is where so much scholarship on bodies in Roman literature is stuck. Rather it is a means of our desire’s watching theirs, and thus of having one’s cake while eating it. In satire we watch the forbidden acts of others who are happily abandoned to their desires. The speaker demands that we share in his disgust at their lack of moral conscience and self-control. We do that. And yet with him we relish the act of repudiating them – Roman satirists do not just refer to bad behavior, they leer at it, and wallow in it. Watching the satirist watch takes us into a world of forbidden, compensatory pleasures, where losing one’s hegemony never felt so good.

Throughout the history of the genre satirists define themselves in contrast to these degraded others who fail to make the grade of “real Romans” by being, in turns, too prurient and cheap, malicious, too superficial, complacent, or droll.19 Horace attempts to redefine satire as the carefully controlled

19 For late instances, see e.g. Anthony Ashley Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury, “Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor” (1709), in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (Birmingham 1773) vol. 1, and Joseph Addison’s Spectator essays nos. 35, 47, 58–63, and 249 in ed. John Loftis, Joseph Addison: Essays in Criticism and Literary

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straight talk of an Epicurean friend, someone rather far down the social scale, but noble at heart. Lost in transition are the effusiveness of Lucilius, and his indifference to caution, decorum, and tact. Lucilius had targeted some of the most powerful of Rome’s political elite, strafing them in piques of glistening rage. This would become the stuff of legend, Lucilius as the tooth-and-nail attacker, a partial truth that accrues to him as myth to hero. In her essay, Frances Muecke provides a much fuller account of what Lucilius’ poems were about. But it is primarily his aggression, and his failure to check himself in any situation whatever, that his legend privileges (making failure, of a certain kind, the key to his success). Horace, in turn, targets type-characters, unnamed fools, and persons of no particular account. Much closer to the bottom of the social ladder’s acceptable range than to the top, Horace could not afford to make enemies. Again as Gowers points out, his guarded speech is both a condition of, and commentary upon, his vulnerable place within Roman society (a freed slave’s son and fighter for “freedom’s” losing cause at Philippi). Whereas Lucilius had played censor for all of Rome, thus filling an open slot on the Roman library’s Latin shelves that corresponds roughly to the poets of Old Comedy on the Greek side (again see Muecke), Horace avoids the political fray. He privatizes the satirist’s censorial gaze by routing its observations back on himself, telling on others, but only as a means of self-improvement, just as his father once taught him.

According to his legend, Lucilius chastised not folly generally, but fools, wherever he saw them. He was reckless, named names, made enemies. Horace struggles to adapt this set of expectations to his own restricted situation in the company of powerful men. The mismatch of “genre” to “poet” is palpable throughout his *Sermones*. But the clearest evidence of satire’s having taken an abrupt turn towards guardedness and introspection in Horace is seen not just in the poet’s lack of political aggression, but in his use of his stylus’s eraser end. Lucilius, Horace complains, never erased anything from his thoughts or from his page. But why should he? His thoughts were his page. He wrote whatever came to mind not just because he was unimpressed by Greek-style refinements, but because he could get away with stating his opinions bluntly. He was exceedingly rich, powerful, and well connected, and that luxuriance of self-possession and political wherewithal crams his pages chock-full. It makes them “satire.” Horace does not have

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20 For the names in Horace, see Rudd (1966) 132–59.
21 See Horace, *S.* 1.4.103–59. For the fictional, New Comic coloring of Horace’s father, see Leach (1971).

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