

INTRODUCTION

SATIRE is a paradox. It is poetry which denies that it *is* poetry. It is a moralizing rant which is sucked into prurience about and even complicity with the vice and folly it rails against. It is a cutting-edge slice-of-life which is obsessively self-conscious about its own literary traditions. It is free speech which tells it how it is but is always constrained by limitations on its liberty. Yet even by these standards, Horace's satire is exceptionally paradoxical. It is a finely wrought, pared-down form of a genre whose very essence is bloatedness, disorder, rough edges, a literary equivalent of the messy, chaotic world it evokes. It is a gentle, detached take on the genre of ranting, even bigoted invective, and one which advocates the virtues of moderation with fanatical extremism. In order to gain a sense of how Horace fits, or figured himself as fitting, into the traditions of Roman satire, it will be worth reflecting a little on the history and nature of Roman satire,¹ before turning to Horace's engagement—and sometimes his refusal to engage—with various themes and issues.

A brief history of satire

Roman satire has points of contact with various Greek genres—the invective *iamboi* of Archilochus and Hipponax, which Horace remodelled more directly in the *Epodes*; the socially and politically engaged Old Comedy of Aristophanes and his rivals, explicitly cited as a forebear at the opening of *Sat.* 1.4; the philosophical sermons, or diatribes, of Cynic philosophers, particularly influential on *Sat.* 1.1–3—but, unlike epic, tragedy, lyric, and every other genre, it was neither invented by the Greeks nor did they provide its canonical poets. Satire was a quintessentially Roman genre, 'entirely ours' (*tota nostra*), as Quintilian famously called it. This was not merely a paragraph of literary history or a badge of national pride, but suffused the very ethos of satire, linking to its rejection of pretension, luxury, and all the corrupting influences so readily attributed to the Greeks and its concomitant assertion of simple Roman values. When the Roman god Quirinus warns Horace not to use Greek words in his satires, he is making a point quite as ideologically loaded as when Juvenal's bigot Umbricius rails against the 'Greek city' which he claims Rome had become.

Satire's self-consciousness extends to a preoccupation with its own name. The alternative etymologies of *satira* given by the fourth-century AD grammarian Diomedes all (except for the improbable link with satyrs) relate to fullness, even bloatedness, and to an ugly, messy heterogeneity: he derives it from either a composite legal bill (*lex satira*), or a plate full of mixed dishes to be offered to the gods (*lanx satira*), or a sort of stuffed sausage or black pudding (*farciimen*). These etymologies seem to reflect much of satire's self-construction as a genre which is stuffed full of humanity with all its fears, desires, vices, and follies, variegated content which denies it the purity and unity associated with more respectable types of literature. Moreover, the connection with food cannot be coincidental, since satire is obsessed with the low bodily functions and desires which find no place in higher genres but which form the very essence, the stuffing of the sausage that is satire. As Alvin Kernan put it in a study of English satire which revolutionized approaches to its Roman predecessor, 'man is caught in his animal functions of eating, drinking, lusting, displaying his body, copulating, evacuating, scratching'.² Food in particular is a recurrent motif, especially in Horace's second book of *Satires*. It