GHOSTLY GUESTS AND VENOMOUS SNAKES: TRACES OF CIVIL WAR IN HORACE, SATIRES 2.8*

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...the times have been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools ...

(William Shakespeare, Macbeth Act 3, Scene 4, 78-82)

ABSTRACT

Not only is Sat. 2.8 Horace’s final satire, but, dated to around 30 BCE, it was published at a watershed moment in Roman, and indeed world, politics – the aftermath of the Battle of Actium. This article argues that both the poem’s literary position as Horace’s ultimate satire, and its chronological position at the end of an epoch are significant for our understanding of it. Sat. 2.8 reviews and reflects not only on much of Horace’s prior writing, but also on the preceding ten to fifteen years of civil war. It is suggested that issues of defeat and death (as well as victory and vengeance), not often considered relevant for this ‘comedy of manners’, provide a powerful subtext to the satire, and that some of the figures that appear at the banquet described in Sat. 2.8 are ghosts from the remote and, in some cases, recent past.

Introduction

Although once dismissed by scholars as a weak and unworthy ending to Horace’s second collection of Satires, Satire 2.8 has, in recent years, begun

* My thanks are due to one of the anonymous referees who made substantial comments on this paper, to Stephen Harrison who gave me much useful advice when he visited South Africa early in 2011, and to David Wardle who generously sent me excerpts from his draft commentary on Suetonius: Life of Augustus (forthcoming, O.U.P).

1 See, for example, Fraenkel 1957:144; Rudd 1966:222; Coffey 1976:89.
to be recognised for the complex and carefully-fashioned artefact it is. In this article, I shall suggest that there is more to Sat. 2.8 than the amusing ‘comedy of manners’ that appears on the surface. It is my intention to show that there is a macabre, sinister undertone to this dinner which scholars have not fully explored before, and, going hand-in-hand with this, a political aspect to Sat. 2.8 which has largely gone unnoticed, but which is both potent and poignant, given the time and the context in which the poem was first published.

Season(ing) of the witch

The majority of scholars to treat Sat. 2.8 have read the ambitious host Nasidienus and his culinary pretensions as the butt of this satire, filtered through the unfailing comic vision of the absent Horace’s informant, the comedy-writer Fundanius. As befits both the satiric genre and his own

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3 It has now been many years since the initial publication of Du Quesnay’s seminal paper on the political significance of Horace’s Satires 1 (in Woodman & West 1984; recently republished in Freudenburg 2009), but the present article owes much to his pioneering work in this area. My aim here is not to replace previous readings of this poem, but simply to point to an alternative way of viewing Horace’s final satire.
4 Although the dramatic fiction of Sat. 2.8 has Horace missing the cena Nasidieni and hearing about it only on the following day (not invited, presumably, and overlooked as an extra at the table; cf. Sat. 2.7.29-35), I would argue that he is there in a disguised form. The gustatio offered by Nasidienus is a Lucanian boar, as Fundanius explains in reply to Horace’s question as to which dish first placated the angry belly: in primis Lucanus aper (‘First, there was Lucanian boar’, Sat. 2.8.6). This boar is surrounded by sharp-tasting vegetables, bitter turnips, radishes, and so on, which Gowers (1993:171) notes is suggestive of ‘the dangers of satirical acerbity’. In the satire where he was concerned with such things, Sat. 2.1, Horace identifies himself as a follower of Lucilius who is half-Lucanian and half-Apulian, since the Venusian colonist ploughs close to both their borders: sequor hunc, Lucanus an Apulas ances; nam Venusinus arat finem sub utrumque colonus (Sat. 2.1.34-35). There he made the connection between these ancient war-like tribes and the potential virulence of satire (2.1.36-39). I would suggest that the Lucanian boar (here dead and cooked, a starter for the guests) stands for the Lucanian Horace and for his lost potential as a satirist in the Lucilian mould. Having lost his family farm in the area to which attention is drawn here, he is also the first victim of the civil wars which, as I shall argue, pervade this satire.
5 Fundanius is approvingly mentioned at Sat. 1.10.40-42, in association with Horace’s literary friends Varuis, Vergil and others, as the writer of plots typical of
literary inclinations, Fundanius views the events of the *cena Nasidieni* as a comedy, sometimes even bordering on farce or mime; yet, perhaps, a tragic version of these events is there just below the surface for the reader to excavate. In 1987 Robert J. Baker called attention to the fact that the behaviour of Maecenas and his retinue at this dinner is in fact far from exemplary. Nasidienus is, after all, their host, and they his guests. But far from behaving like the ‘contented guests’ they should be, departing from the cena when satiated, Maecenas’ ungracious companions laugh at the host behind his back, openly try to drink him out of house and home, taste nothing of his banquet, and, in the end, run away. Horace, it seems, may purposefully have distanced himself from this dinner-party.

However, it has also been suggested that the rejection of the foodstuffs on offer and the flight of Horace’s friends at the end of this satire is perhaps the only appropriate response to Nasidienus’ dinner. If the dinner were poisoned, for example, or in some manner sacrilegious, or if

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New or Roman Comedy: *arguta meretrice pates Davoque Chremeta | eludente senum comic garrire libellis | unus vivorum, Fundani* *(‘You alone of living poets, Fundanius, can rattle off engaging volumes in which the crafty courtesan and Davus fool old Chremes’; transl. Brown 1993:85).*

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4 Horace asks Fundanius to tell him about the dinner ‘si grave non est’, which can mean ‘if it’s not too serious a matter’ in addition to the obvious meaning of ‘if it’s not too burdensome/too much trouble’ (*Sat.* 2.8.4). Gowers 1993:164 draws attention to the fact that at Nasidienus’ dinner two of the guests, the tragedian Varus and the comedian Fundanius, balance each other out, complementing each other’s approach just as Agathon and Aristophanes complemented the mixture of solemnity and fun at the *Symposium*. The balance of seriousness and comedy in satire is often mentioned by Horace (*Sat.* 1.1.23-27, 1.10.11; Gowers 1993:162).

7 Baker 1987:214 argues that the traditional view of Nasidienus as the butt of the *Sat.* 2.8 is misplaced, and that ‘it is not Nasidienus who is the primary butt of the satire but his guests, Maecenas among them, for their rude behaviour, which culminates in their abrupt departure from the party.’ Baker maintains that the guests’ rude response punishes their host disproportionately for the fault of merely trying too hard to please his guests. Lowe 2010:244-52 has argued cogently that the ungrateful guests are characterised as Harpies.

8 Although the *topos* of the soul who departs graciously from life, like a ‘contented guest’ from a feast where he has had his fill, is not directly mentioned in *Sat.* 1.8, it is arguably a subtext of the poem. The ‘contented guest’ is first mentioned by the Horatian satirist at *Sat.* 1.1.118-19: *exacto contentus tempore vita | cedat uti convivium satiat . . .*, in an echo of Lucretius, *DRN* 3.938: *cur non ut plenus vitae convivum recedes?* The appropriate behaviour for actual guests is also the focus of many of Horace’s Satires, and the horrifying spectacle of the ungracious guest who verbally attacks his fellow diners, and later, when sufficiently drunk, even the host himself, is presented to us at *Sat.* 1.4.86-89.
witchcraft or some other evil were involved, then fleeing for the purposes of self-preservation, rather than staying for the sake of being polite, would be the correct thing to do. In 1995 Kirk Freudenburg argued that, as cook, Nasidienus is to be aligned with the witch Canidia, who appears in the final lines of the poem (and the book), given that many of the dishes on offer contain substances not often found in recipes, but more commonly used as stimulants and aphrodisiacs. In this paper, I intend to examine further the negative power and malevolent influence of Canidia at this dinner, and to tie her more closely to the theme of death which I shall suggest pervades this satire.

Disaster befalls the dinner-party when some aulaea,⁹ awnings or curtain suspended over the dining-room, collapse, bringing down ‘more black dust than the North wind stirs up from the Campanian fields’ onto the elaborate eel dish (just introduced in great detail by the host): 

\[\text{trahentia pulvers atri | quantum non Aquilo Campanis excitat agris} (\text{Sat. 2.8. 55-56}).\] ¹¹ All the ostentatious table-cleaning that went on at the beginning of the cena has come to nought,¹² in that dirt and disaster have struck the dinner from above. The black dust cloud has rendered the meal, grotesque as it was before, now entirely inceditable. Much has been made of the deathly, sterile imagery of the eel dish, onto which this dust falls, but dust itself and the colour black were often associated with death and the chthonic powers of the underworld. It is noteworthy that things often fall

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⁹ Freudenburg 1995:215 observes that Canidia, appearing in the final line of the satire, is ‘the last in a series of images suggesting a link between Nasidienus’ feast and the witch’s black arts. The parting comparison with Canidia unmasks the host, exposing him as a conjurer on the make, a version of the witch-hag intent on entrapping an unsuspecting lover.’

¹⁰ As Caston 1997:250-53 has pointed out, the term aulaea could also refer to a stage curtain – and interestingly, the curtain on a Roman stage went down at the start of a performance and up at the end, the opposite of the modern stage (251) – so, she argues, it is possible that this marks the beginning of a ‘comic play’ within the satire, orchestrated by Fundanius the comedian-narrator (251-53).

¹¹ As often in this satire, the use of a mock-epic simile in a comic context adds to the humour (Gowers 1993:164-65).


¹³ The eel or lamprey, as the host explains, was ‘caught pregnant, since after spawning it will deteriorate in the flesh’ (‘… haec gravida’ inquit | ‘capta est deterior post partum carne futura’, Sat. 2.8.43-44). Paul Allen Miller 2005:409, comments that ‘… the pregnant lamprey is sterile and perverse. It will never give birth but has been frozen in this state for the purposes of consumption. The grotesquerie is then compounded by it being presented as if it were alive with shrimp swimming about.’
or collapse when, for example, the gods are against them: someone or
something does not like this dinner-party. The reference to the black dust
of Campania\textsuperscript{14} may have a particular significance for Canidia: not only is
the colour black representative of the venomous type of invective with
which she was associated in Horace's iambic poetry, but as J.H. D'Arms
has shown,\textsuperscript{15} the fact that her (implied) illegitimate son who is mentioned
at \textit{Epode} 17.50, is given the epigraphically-attested Campanian name
Pactumeius, may suggest that Canidia herself was imagined as coming from
this region.\textsuperscript{16} If this connection is correct, then the raining down of the
black earth of this iambic witch's native territory onto Nasidienus' dinner

table would indicate that she, an outsider in satire despite her occasional
appearances in this genre, could be imagined occupying a position of
external, but malevolent power (maybe even sabotaging the dinner with
the inedible seasoning of earth?). As amusing as is the image of Nasidienus'
carefully choreographed \textit{cena} covered with black dust, it is also a sinister
one:\textsuperscript{17} the dead eel and her dead offspring are interred in dust that is
compared to black, ironically fertile soil.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Literally, 'black dust from the Campanian fields' (\textit{pulveris atri \ldots Campanis \ldots agris}, 2.8.55-56).
\textsuperscript{15} D'Arms 1987:142-43.
\textsuperscript{16} I do not believe, however, that the name Canidia is a pseudonym for a real
woman, the most commonly cited candidate being one metrically-equivalent
Gratidia. Another consideration is that Canidia may be playfully supposed a
feminine version of Canidius Crassus, the commander of Antony's land forces,
who died in 30 BCE; cf. Nisbet 1995:170-71; Henderson 1987:113. However, the
witch Canidia is too much of an archetypal, complex figure to be tied entirely to
one historical person, although, as I shall argue, she may be aligned at the end of
this particular satire with Cleopatra VII of Egypt.
\textsuperscript{17} Pace Freudenburg 1993:234, who commented: 'In the annihilation of the fish
course, death injects itself into Nasidienus' dinner party in its most unthreatening,
comic form.'
\textsuperscript{18} The soil of this area is dark-coloured and highly fertile due to its volcanic
nature. However, it is said that the Romans did not realise that Vesuvius was a
potentially active volcano until its surprise eruption in 79 CE, when it destroyed a
number of towns in the area, including Herculaneum and Pompeii (but cf. Strabo,
\textit{Geogr.} 5.4.8). In this context, though, Canidia is, like the soil, fertile, as shown by
her offspring Pactumeius at \textit{Epode} 17.50, but she also possesses powerfully
negative feminine abilities and chthonic associations, which the black of the soil
also emphasises. Interment in soil seems to be associated with Canidia: her murder
of the boy victim in \textit{Epode} 5 involved burying him up to his neck in earth.
Death at the dinner-party

The initial response of the guests to the 'fall of the curtain' is not one of mirth, but of alarm, as Fundanius relates: 'We feared something greater, but after we realised there was no danger, we got up' (nos maius veriti, postquam nihil esse perici | sensimus, erigimur, 2.8.57-58a). Iaria Marchesi has suggested that the fact that Nasidienus' guests were afraid that worse was to come, that 'something bigger' was to descend on them (nos maius veriti), and that they could be in danger, is a reference to a rather macabre incident recorded by Callimachus in his Aitia (Fr. 64.3-14), and also recounted by Cicero (De orat 2.353). At the infamous 'Dinner at the Scopades', the poet Simonides was the only survivor when the roof of the dining-room collapsed, crushing all the banqueters so badly that their corpses were unrecognisable. Simonides, however, was able to recall where each of the diners had been sitting, so he could help the relatives of the victims identify the correct bodies for separate burial. Marchesi argues that Horace, Satire 2.8 alludes to this unfortunate incident, not only in the phrase nos maius veriti (we feared something greater, i.e. the roof collapsing), but also in Fundanius' recollection of the banquet, and in the description he gives to Horace, of where each of the guests at Nasidienus' cena were seated.

Marchesi's observations suggest to me that, as with the food and death theme so prominent at the later cena of Trimalchio in Petronius' Satyricon, which is widely recognised as owing much to Horace, Satire 2.8, the theme of death is not far from Nasidienus' dinner-party either. It is striking, in this context, that Maecenas' parasites are called umbrae, when scurrae may have sufficed. Although umbrae is a common enough term for 'hangers-on' or 'uninvited guests', more than one scholar has commented

19 The implication of the term erigimur (we got up) is that the guests all dived for cover when they thought the ceiling was coming down on them.
20 See Marchesi 2005.
21 See Sat. 2.8.20-24.
22 For my purposes here, it is best to assume that only Vibidius and Balatro are referred to as Maecenas' parasites (umbrae, literally, 'shadows' or 'shades'), but grammatically umbrae (line 22) could potentially (as a subtle joke, perhaps) refer to all the prior names mentioned from line 20 onwards, including Viscus Thurinus (line 20), Varius Rufus (line 21) and Fundanius himself (line 20): 'summus ego et prope me Viscus Thurinus et infra, | si memini, Varius, cum Servilio Balatro | Vibidius, quos Maecenas adduxerat umbrae' (I was on the top couch and next to me was Viscus Thurinus, and below, if I remember correctly, Varius, and Vibidius together with Servilius Balatro, whom Maecenas had brought along as his 'shadows', Sat. 2.8.20-22).
on the ironic associations of this term with the dead. O'Connor comments that, as *umbrae*, the parasites 'connote something sinister and nether-worldly.' Marchesi, likewise, notes that by being called *umbrae*, 'Maecenas' retinue is lexically associated with death and the underworld. If Horace were at the party, he may also have termed an *umbra*, as it is a constant joke in the *Satires* that he is really just a parasite to Maecenas.

Equally funereal, but also comic is Nasidienus' response to this culinary catastrophe. Upon witnessing the destruction of his second course (*secundae mensae*) which he had so lovingly and so carefully served up to his guests with a detailed commentary, Nasidienus, we are told, buried his head and wept as though his son had died before reaching maturity: *Rufus posito capite, ut si filius immaturus obisset, flere* (2.8.58-59). This would indeed be the greatest disaster for a Roman father – except that Nasidienus is crying over the demise of a dish at a dinner-party. This comment, of course, indicates that the way in which the host wept was completely out of proportion to the nature of the disaster, but it also shows how much store he had set by this dinner of his – after all, he is earlier curiously referred to as the *cenae pater*, 'the father of the feast' (2.8.7), when introducing his *gustatio*. This incident is telling about Nasidienus' intentions with his *cena*: in a world where children were regarded as security for old age, a son's premature death would mean that he could never assist his father with economic or social support. Likewise, the destruction of Nasidienus' feast means that it can no longer help the *cenae pater* with his plans of social advancement through acceptance into the circle of Maecenas.

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23 In its meaning as 'ghosts' or 'shades', *umbrae* occurs at Sat. 1.8.41, where the ghosts raised by the witches' nightly rituals are engaging in sad, shrill (*triste et acutum*) dialogue with Sagana.
26 Lowe 2010:252-54 has recently suggested that the Rufus mentioned here is not Nasidienus at all but Varius Rufus, who was also present at the cena, introduced at line 21. Lowe suggests that Varius Rufus is not crying here but trying to hide his hysterical laughter, just as, later, he struggles to hide his mirth in his napkin (63-64). If this is the case, however, it is striking that every (other?) time Horace refers to Varius Rufus in the poem, he calls him simply Varius. Nasidienus, on the other hand, is called not only Nasidienus, but is also identified by a host of other titles, including *cenae pater* (line 7) and *parochus* ('caterer', line 36). Gosling 1986:101 observed that in the course of Sat. 2.8 Horace refers to Nasidienus in as many as nine different ways.
27 Seeing that Nasidienus is described as the *cenae pater*, and cries over the destruction of *his* cena like a father over a son, Gowers (1993:177) concludes that
It is striking how often terms associated with life, death and revenge occur in this satire, sometimes in close sequence. At Sat. 2.8.3-4, Fundanius tells Horace that Nasidienus' cena was the best time he had in his whole life: "sic ut mihi numquam | in vita fuerit melius. At Sat. 2.8.34, Vibidius comments to Servilius Balatro that they will 'die unavenged' if they do not drink Nasidienus bankrupt: 'nos nisi damnose bibimus, moriemur inulti'. Not surprisingly, Nasidienus is himself described as turning a deathly pale when he hears this: "vertere pallor | tum parochi faciem ...' (Paller then transformed the face of the caterer ...), 35-36). After the fall of the tapestries, Fundanius asks what end there would have been ("quis esset | finis ...", 59-60), if 'wise' Nomentanus had not cheered up his friend, literally 'lifted' him: "quis esset | finis, ni sapiens sic Nomentanus amicum | tolleret?" (Sat. 2.8.59-61). Not only is the idea of an 'end' ("finis", 60) suggestive of death, but 'lifting' ("tolleret", 61) also had the additional meaning of 'destroying' or 'getting rid of'. Both of these terms are emphasised by being first in their respective lines (60 and 61). Shortly thereafter, Balatro assures Nasidienus that the vicissitudes of human life are 'the condition of living' ("condicio vivendi", 2.8.65). At the end of 2.8, there is something of a 'Thyestean feast' in the last dish that is brought in, where Nasidienus' dinner/progeny appears in mutilated and disguised form. L. Varius Rufus, also present at this dinner, wrote a tragedy called Thyestes.

28 For all his other associations and frequent appearance in Horace's Satires as a wastrel or spendthrift (see Sat. 1.2.101; 2.1.22; 2.3.175, 224-38), Nomentanus is mentioned at Sat. 1.8.11 among the dead buried in the common people's mass grave on the Esquiline, a location still frequented by the body-snatching witches Canidia and Sagana despite its rehabilitation as Maecenas' Gardens.

29 At Ad Fam. 11.20.1 Brutus, writing to Cicero, mentions the latter's pun on the double meaning of "toll" that he had used with regard to Octavian in the wake of Mutina: "laudandum adulescentem, ornandum, tollendum" (that the youth should be praised, honoured, and "dispatched"); see also Velleius Paterculus 2.62.6 and Suetonius, Aug. 12, where Octavian complains about this incident to Antony in order to be reconciled with him. If Nasidienus is indeed to be identified with Salvidienus Rufus, as I shall argue below, then, appropriately, it was one such reconciliation between Octavian and Antony that led to his downfall. Sat. 2.8.59-61 could therefore be taken to mean 'Where would it all have ended, if wise Nomentanus [the namer] had not thus "dispatched" his friend?' I am not suggesting that Nomentanus really tried to kill Nasidienus, but merely observing that puns on and references to death, especially in association with the civil wars, pervade this satire.

30 The Greek conclusion to the topoi surrounding the unpredictability of Fortune is, of course, the famous adage: 'Call no man happy until he is dead', as is stated at
Fundanius describes himself and his friends escaping the dinner as 'fleeing in vengeance' or 'fleeing avenged' (*fugimus ulti* 93).\(^{31}\) Taken alone, each of these references may not amount to much, but together they suggest a particular tone and focus in this satire. While appearing on the surface as a comedy, Sat. 2.8 has serious undertones of death, destruction, flight and revenge,\(^ {32}\) issues that were of great significance in the civil wars. Revenge in particular was a central motif for Octavian, the self-styled son and avenger of the murdered Julius Caesar, and the future dedicatory of the temple of Mars Ultor; indeed, revenge was the whole cause of the latest round of civil wars and the deaths associated with them. Sat. 2.8, the last poem of Horace's second collection, was likely written or at least published in the wake of the Battle of Actium in 30 BCE, when Octavian's lengthy and elaborate plans for revenge against his enemies had finally come to fruition. Yet, why are these themes haunting Nasidienus' dinner-party? My suspicions are that we may be encouraged to regard some of those present at the cena in Sat. 2.8 as representations of dead people, enemies whom the avenging Octavian had defeated and caused to die.\(^ {33}\) Most of the individuals in question can be viewed in two ways: on the one hand, they are the comic characters who appear on the surface, but, when viewed in a different, tragic light, they are simultaneously the victims of recent history.

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the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Note that Nasidienus is called *beatus* (Sat. 2.8.1).\(^ {31}\) My emphasis.

\(^ {32}\) Revenge on the part of the Dioscuri was the reason for the collapse of Scopas' roof. Scopas had paid Simonides only half of what was agreed, as the poet had included a long passage about Castor and Pollux in the panegyric he had been commissioned to compose. Simonides was spared death by being called out of the room at the last minute by two young men, clearly the Dioscuri in disguise ([Callimachus, *Aetia* Fr. 64.11-14; Cicero, *De orat.* 2.353]).

\(^ {33}\) When Octavian had captured Alexandria, Suetonius (Aug. 17) tells us, Antony tried to make an agreement at the last moment, but Octavian forced him to commit suicide and then viewed his corpse: *et Antonium quidem seras condiciones pacis temptantem ad mortem adegit viditque mortuum.*
'I see dead people': a (g)hostly host and dead diners  

The 16th-century French Classical scholar Lambinus was the first to put forward the theory that the name Nasidienus Rufus is a thinly-disguised pseudonym for an historical figure, Q. Salviiomius Rufus. Like the historical figure, Nasidienus has the *cognomen* Rufus (Suet. 28.58), and his *nomen*, although partly a pun on 'nose', sounds very similar to Salviiomius, having the final seven letters in common in the nominative case. Although of humble origins, Salviiomius Rufus had been a boyhood friend of Octavian's (he was one of two people with Octavian at Apollonia when Julius Caesar was assassinated), was one of Octavian's most trusted generals during the civil wars that succeeded Caesar's death, and had already been designated consul for 39 BCE, despite not having held any previous office. In 40 BCE, however, he decided to defect to Antony's side along with Octavian's troops in Gallia Narbonensis. By this time Antony had already made a pact with Octavian, and therefore revealed Salviiomius' treachery to his new ally. Salviiomius was accused of high treason by the senate and condemned to death in the autumn of 40 BCE. He was either executed or committed suicide.

34 I am not suggesting that every person present at the *cena Nasidieni* is dead; Maecenas, Fundanius and others are still obviously alive. But I think there is a sense of the dead and the living dining together. This scenario was not unfamiliar to the Romans, who characteristically placed food and drink at the tomb-side of their deceased loved ones, and even celebrated banquets for the dead in some of the spacious tombs of the wealthy.

35 The name Nasidienus has been found on an inscription from the 1st century CE (CIL XIII.8270), so it is possible, but unlikely, given Horace's satirical strategies, that a real person actually called Nasidienus is meant. Muecke 1993:228 cautions: 'If Nasidienus were a named living person, this satire would be the only one to ridicule such a person at length.'


37 Thus Nasidienus Rufus is 'Mr Red Nose', a physical feature that is appropriately often the result of overindulgence in food and wine.

38 In 42 BCE Salviiomius Rufus was acclaimed *imperator* because of his military victories against Sextus Pompey; see Shero 1941:88.

39 Livy, *Periochae librorum* 127: Suetonius (Aug. 66) tells us that Salviiomius Rufus was one of two men out of all Octavian's friends who fell from favour. [The other was Cornelius Gallus.] Dio Cassius (48.32) relates that Salviiomius was from the lowest of backgrounds, a shepherd, from whose head a flame was seen to have issued while he was tending his flocks one day. Dio goes on to tell us that he was so greatly advanced by Octavian as to be made a consul without even being a member of the senate. Dio then comments: 'But nothing in the life of man is lasting, and he was finally accused in the senate by Caesar himself and slain as an
What is interesting is that in the course of the cena in Sat. 2.8, Horace’s Nasidienus is briefly imagined in the guise of a military commander, when, after the disastrous collapse of the curtain, Servilius Balatro attempts to ‘console’ him for his loss, comparing the effects of misfortune on both generals and dinner hosts: *Sed convivatoris, uti ducis, ingenium res adversae nudare solent, celare secundae* – (Adversity tends to reveal, while favourable circumstances hide, the genius of a host, like that of a general, Sat. 2.8:73-74). Disaster, then, is the chance for the brilliant general and the inspired host to reveal their true mettle. The real Salvidienus indeed faced disaster in the end, but only because he betrayed his friend Octavian. The analogy between host and military leader links the career of the historical Salvidienus with the imagined role of his fictional alter ego Nasidienus in Sat. 2.8. But, as often is the case with satire, we have gone from the serious to the ridiculous, as the military battlefield of the historical Salvidienus has become the culinary campaign of the embattled host Nasidienus.

The death of the historical Salvidienus Rufus could have been as little as five years or as much as a decade before the composition of the cena Nasidieni, depending on when Horace wrote this satire: although Sat. 2.8 is the final satire in Horace’s second collection, it does not mean that he necessarily wrote it last. The time difference between Salvidienus Rufus’ fall from grace (40 BCE) and the approximate time of the publication of Horace’s Satires Book Two (30 BCE) is also not necessarily as significant as some scholars have suggested. A lengthy time between the two occurrences may even have made the likelihood of an enemy of Octavian (and thus also of Maecenas and Horace) being satirised by Horace all the more feasible, as the raw emotions involved in the betrayal of a friend may well have subsided by then. As a close friend of Maecenas, Octavian was also part of Horace’s social circle, and may have been in the audience at enemy both of him and of the entire people.’ Velleius Paterculus likewise notes that Salvidienus, although sprung from the most obscure origin (*natus obscursissimis initiis*, 2.76.4), was not satisfied with having received the highest honours in the state, but aspired to mount to a height from where he could look down upon both Octavian and the state (*e quo infra se et Caesarem videret et rem publicam*).

Wiseman 1971:177 comments: ‘Salvidienus Rufus would have been consul too, had he been as careful of his ambition as Octavian’s other generals. Agrippa, for instance, knew well enough that hard work and loyalty were essential …’ Salvidienus may have been encouraged in this course of action by the troops he was commanding in Gallia Narbonensis, many of whom were still loyal to Antony, despite Octavian’s attempts to win them over with gifts of land; see Huzar 1978:139.
Horace’s first reading of this satire, depending on its time of composition and the time of Octavian’s return from the East.\textsuperscript{41} Not solely the host Nasidienus, but also some of the guests present at this \textit{cena} may be literary representations of some of Octavian’s fiercest political enemies over the past ten to fifteen years. At first glance the names Porcius (‘Piggy’ or ‘Hogg’) and Servilius Balatro (‘Slavish Buffoon’) certainly seem appropriate for the comic context of Sat. 2.8. If we’re in any doubt as to the aptness of Porcius’ title, his actions, which include entertaining the crowd by swallowing whole cakes at one go, should put these doubts to rest (Porcius \textit{infra}, \textit{ridiculus totas semel absorbere placen-tas}, 2.8.23b-24). The behaviour of Servilius Balatro, entertaining the dinner-guests with his subversive jesting, along with his obvious position as a parasite of Maecenas, supports the interpretation of his name as a ‘Slavish Buffoon’. However, the aptness of these names in the comic context has effectively disguised the fact that these are also names belonging to some of the fiercest enemies of Octavian over the course of the civil wars. Porcius was, of course, also the distinguished \textit{nomen} of the Porcii Catones, who included Cato the Elder, Cato the Younger, as well the latter’s son Marcus Porcius Cato. Although Cato the Younger (Uticensis) was a staunch enemy of Julius Caesar, it is more probable that his son Marcus Porcius Cato, who was a contemporary of Octavian, is meant. Although pardoned by Caesar after his father’s debacle at Utica, Marcus Porcius Cato died at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE fighting on the side of Brutus (and at that stage, of Horace, too). Likewise, the \textit{nomen} Servilius, although not unusual, was that of Publius Servilius Casca, one of Julius Caesar’s assassins, who also died in the aftermath of the Battle of Philippi, possibly by suicide. Although most references to his name seem to postdate the Augustan era,\textsuperscript{42} it is striking that the interests of the Vibidius who appears in Sat. 2.8 are almost entirely drink-related. At lines 33-35, after being faced with the

\textsuperscript{41} Is Octavian at the \textit{cena Nasidieni}? Viscus Thurinus, at Sat. 2.8.20, is usually assumed to be one of the Viscus brothers mentioned at Sat. 1.10.83. However, it is not known why he is given the cognomen Thurinus (‘from/of Thurii’). Suetonius (\textit{Aug.} 7), however, records that from infancy Octavian was given the cognomen Thurinus, in celebration of his father Gaius Octavius’ victory over a band of fugitive slaves at Thurii shortly after Octavian’s birth. Suetonius says that Mark Antony often used this name in letters in an attempt to insult Octavian, but that the latter refused to take the bait. Horace could be using the name here as a joke, maybe even presenting Octavian as an \textit{umbra} of Maecenas.

\textsuperscript{42} Tacitus (\textit{Ann.} 2.48.3) records that a Vibidius Virro was excluded from the senate during the reign of Tiberius for his spendthrift tendencies. Virro is also the name of the selfish patron in Juvenal, \textit{Sat.} 5.
obscure niceties of Nomentanus’ culinary obsessions, Vibidius turns to Servilius Balatro and suggests that they drink *damnose* (‘ruinously’), implying that they should try to ruin the host financially.43 He at once calls for larger cups, to Nasidienus’ horror. Later, when the host is conveniently out of the room, Vibidius is heard complaining to the slaves that the wine-flagon must be broken, since no more cups are forthcoming.44 According to the image presented of him in contemporary propaganda, admittedly mostly that of his enemies, the triumvir Mark Antony was well known for his excessive drinking and was said to have styled himself after the god Bacchus or Dionysus for that reason.45 In his second Philippic Cicero famously describes Antony as *vino lustrique confectus* (‘worn out by wine and debauchery’, 2.6), makes much of his shameful vomiting in public due to alcoholic overindulgence (2.63), and also mentions his huge drinking cups (*in ipsis tuis immanibus illis poculis*, 2.63).46 Whether or not this

43 ‘*nos nisi damnose bibimus, moriemur inulti*’ (‘Unless we drink him bankrupt, we’ll die unavenged’, Sat. 2.8.35; transl. Muecke 1993:93).

44 *Vibidius dum \| quaerit de puerris num sit quaque frusta lagena, | quod sibi pocuenti non dantur pocula* (Sat. 2.8.80b-82).

45 Plutarch (Ant. 60.2-3) notes that while Antony associated himself with Hercules because of his lineage (his family claimed descent from Hercules, Ant. 4.1-2), he linked himself to Dionysus because of his way of life, calling himself the ‘New Dionysus’; cf. Ant. 24.3; 27.3. The marked antagonism between Nasidienus and Vibidius in this satire is clearly, on one level, the simple loathing of a host who is supplying all the wine (Nasidienus is called *parochus*, ‘caterer’, at line 36) towards a guest who has expressed a desire to drink him bankrupt, but, on another level, the horror of a victim who recognises the one who betrayed him and caused his downfall. We have seen that Nasidienus is described as turning a deathly pale (cf. *vertere pallor | tum parochi faciem…*, 35-36) the moment that he hears Vibidius speaking about drinking and about ‘dying unavenged’ (*moriemur inulti*, 34). It is as if Salvidienus has just recognised Antony in the afterlife. The dismissive term *parochus*, which seems intended to reduce Nasidienus/Salvidienus to the limits of his lowly and possibly provincial origins, is used one other time in Horace’s *Satires*: *parochi* refers to local suppliers at Sat. 1.3.46, a poem about the reconciliation of Octavian and Antony, which ironically caused the downfall of the *parochus* in Sat. 2.8.

46 At *Philippic* 2.66 Cicero claimed that Antony, with the appetite of a Charybdis, used up Pompey’s wine collection when he took over the latter’s house. At *Philippic* 5.24, Antony is said, in addition to many other unflattering things, to be ‘always drunk’ (*sempar ebrium*). Antony even attempted to defend himself against these accusations in a lost treatise entitled *De sua ebrietate* (On his drunkenness). Plutarch in his *Life of Antony* blames Curio for introducing Antony to drink (2.3), but admits elsewhere that, when on campaign, Antony’s ‘drinking flask’ was always in evidence (4.2). Octavian’s enemies, it seems, are often portrayed as
image is a fair portrayal of the historical Antony, it is evident that his enemies would have found it useful to emphasise these vices. I would suggest that Vibidius may be figuratively associated with Antony, as he embodies the sort of excess that was attributed to Antony in contemporary propaganda.

The problem with the identification of Nasidienus, Porcius, Servilius, and Vibidius with Octavian’s mortal enemies is that these enemies were all dead by 30 BCE, some even by 40 BCE: what are they all doing at what appears to be a very contemporary banquet? Sat. 2.8 is, of course, an imaginary scenario, and Horace can put at the dinner table anyone he wishes, dead or alive. But there are two possibilities: one is that the whole dinner may be set in the past, at the time when these people were still alive, and as we have seen in Sat. 1.7, where he presents a scene from Brutus’ camp prior to Philippi, the Horatian satirist was unafraid of controversial reminiscences; the other explanation is that these figures are ghosts, spectres from the past, haunting the present. More problematic is that Maecenas and other close friends of Horace, who are undoubtedly alive at this time, are there, dining along with these figures. What does it mean that the ‘good guys’ are there along with defeated enemies of Octavian?

The cena, I would suggest, is not only the natural metaphor for the genre of satire, but, as is evident in the image of the ‘contented guest’ scenario, which is arguably a subtext of this poem, it is a metaphor for life itself and in particular, the life experiences which everyone in this poem, from Nasidienus/Salvidienus to Horace all went through – the experience of the civil wars. At one time or another, they were all friends and associates who on many occasions may have shared the same dinner-table or military mess. All victims in one way or another of these wars, the ghosts who appear at the cena are there in no logical order, but rather like a dream sequence, they haunt the living who remember them and who might easily have ended up like they have. There is some ‘survivor shock’ (and perhaps guilt as well) in this poem: the civil wars are now over, and Horace is surprised to be alive still. While this is to be celebrated, the ghosts in this poem are there as a reminder of what the triumph of the new regime ultimately cost.

The real locus of evil and power in the poem, however, is focused not around the pathetic male ghosts, but around the witch Canidia. It may be

inebriated Cleopatra is later described by Horace as being drunk on Mareotic wine when striving to defeat Rome (Ode 1.37.14).

47 For perceptive readings of this satire, see Henderson 1998:73-107; Gowers 2002; Schlegel 2005:77-89.
imagined that the ghosts in this satire have been raised by Canidia, who towards the end of Horace’s final Epode, is heard triumphantly boasting about her powers of necromancy, the fact that she is able (she claims), among her other talents, to raise the dead from ashes: crematos excitare mortuos (Epode 17.79). The ‘art’ by which Nasidienus is now set to repair his fortunes (ut arte emendaturus fortunam, Sat. 2.8.84-85) is not necessarily only the culinary one, but may also be the black arts of witchcraft, courtesy (perhaps) of Canidia. When Nasidienus returns from the kitchen, with a ‘changed expression’ on his face (mutatae frontis, 2.8.85), and with the replacement dish, a sacrificial platter (mazonomus, 86) of meats that appear to have been violently torn or wrenched apart, or destroyed in some manner, it all begins to look suspiciously like Canidia’s doing. This is reminiscent of her treatment of the sacrificial lamb at Sat. 1.8.27, which she and her friend Sagana tear apart with their teeth, witnessed by the terrified statue of Priapus. One is compelled to ask, as Horace does tongue-in-cheek at Epode 3.7-8: an malas Canidia tractavit dapes? (‘Has Canidia handled this evil feast?’) The image of

48 The phrase ut arte emendaturus fortunam (‘to amend one’s fortune by means of skill’) has been identified by Ellen Oliensis (1997; 1998:58-62) as of great importance not only for this satire, but for Horatian satire in general. She argues that this phrase stands not only for Nasidienus’ intentions in the final phase of this satire, but also indirectly for Horace himself, who had been on the ‘wrong’ side of the political fence at the Battle of Philippi, but who by his art or skill (ars) in writing poetry, saw fit to amend or ameliorate his lot in life, and thus gain entry to Maecenas’ coterie. Oliensis thus identifies the unfortunate Nasidienus, whom she calls ‘one of life’s losers’, as a curious self-satiric model for Horace himself (ironically, Nasidienus is termed beatus, ‘blessed’ at Sat. 2.8.1). But, of course, there is one main difference: Horace is successful in his bid to enter Maecenas’ circle, whereas Nasidienus (and most scholars think this is his aim in hosting the cena) is not. However, if Nasidienus is really to be identified with the dead Salvidienus, he would be even more of a ‘loser’, having lost his life and his reputation.

49 Freudenburg 1995:214 points out that a mazonomus (‘trencher’) was usually used to distribute food and gifts at public religious festivals, and that the combination of salt and barley on the mutilated male crane (line 87) is suggestive of a sacrifice, and a sacrilegious one at that.

50 See the comments of Gowers 1993:176.

51 pullam divellere mordicus agnam coeperunt (Sat. 1.8.27-28). The lamb is sacrificed likewise in order to raise the spirits of the dead. Stephen Harrison (2007:100-03) has explored the manner in which this scene is a parody of the famous necromantic scene in Odyssey 11.

52 The garlic-laden dish in Epode 3, it is playfully suggested, is as bad as something poisonous and full of snake’s venom, and may have been cooked up by Canidia:
Canidia, just off-stage at this sabotaged dinner-party, and using her zombie puppet Nasidienus to gain power or cause destruction, is compelling. Witches like Canidia were notorious for concocting love spells, but their other forte was, of course, poison.53

Canidia and Cleopatra

In the last lines of Sat. 2.8, the guests, presented with this possibly poisoned dish, decide that their best course is simply to flee the dinner: *quem nos sic fugimus ut nihil omnino gustaremus, velut illis Canidia afflasset peior serpentibus Afris* (‘In vengeance we fled in such a way that we tasted nothing, as though Canidia, worse than African snakes, had breathed on those things’, Sat. 2.8.93-95). African snakes were understood to be the fiercest of serpents, and even their breath was believed to be foul and poisonous.54 Snakes and snake venom may have been uppermost in Roman minds at this time due to the famous suicide of Cleopatra VII of Egypt, who is purported to have died by self-inflicted snake-bite on 12 August 30 BCE, rather than be brought to Rome to be led in Octavian’s planned triumph. This event may have taken place round about the time that this satire was published, and due to his political connections, Horace may have been among the first to learn of it.55 Many details surrounding

*quid hoc veneni saevit in praecordiis? num viperinus his cruor incoctus herbis me fefeller, an malas Canidia tractavit dapes?* (‘What is this poison that rages in my guts? Has a stew of snakes’ venom deceived me with herbs? Has Canidia handled this evil feast?’, Epode 3.4-8). Snake venom is associated with Canidia here as at the end of Sat. 2.8 (although there, as I shall argue, it may have further associations).

At Sat. 1.8.18-19 Canidia and Sagana (and possibly other witches) are referred to by the Priapus as ‘women, who steer human minds with spells and poisons’ (*carminibus quae versant atque venenis humanos animos*). At Sat. 2.1.47-48 Canidia is said to threaten her enemies with Albucius’ poison (whether this was poison used on someone called Albucius or used by an Albucius on others, is not known): *… minitatur… | Canidia Albuci quibus est inimica venenum.* Venenum is the witch’s weapon of choice, just as the *stilus* is the satirist’s (Sat. 2.1.39).

At Odes 3.10.18 Horace implies that ‘Mauretanian snakes’ (*Mauris… angulibus*) are particularly force, and Columella (*Rust. 8.5.18*) maintains that snake breath alone could be poisonous (perhaps misunderstanding snakes’ striking range or spitting ability?). See Muecke 1993:239.

My argument depends on the question of whether or not the completion of this satire postdated Cleopatra’s death. This is to some extent mitigated by the certainty that Horace edited his writing extensively after its initial composition. The snakes are said to be ‘African’ rather than ‘Egyptian’ perhaps for metrical

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Cleopatra's death are veiled in mystery; yet the tradition that has come down to us, and which Horace himself seems to have believed (or, at least, promoted), is the official Augustan version that the Egyptian queen killed herself by means of a poisonous snake-bite. In his Ode 1.37, the famous reasons or to make the reference to Cleopatra's suicide tentative and subtle. Although initially referring to a smaller area (Africa propria or Africa provincia, i.e. the area around Carthage), the term 'African' was gradually applied to the entire North African area, including Egypt. An early alternate reading of the final line of Sat. 2.8 has atris ('black') replace Abris ('African'). The famous image at Odes 1.37:26-28 also has Cleopatra handling fierce snakes (phalal) and imbibing their black venom (atrum ... venenum, 27-28). If one accepts the atris reading for the last word of Sat. 2.8, it is just possible to recover the main elements of Cleopatra's name from the final line: Læutidia affuse pugn serpentinus atris (Sat. 2.8:95; my emphasis). The numerous sibilants mimic the hissing sound of the snakes, here entwined around 'Cleopatra'. For a similar word-play in Horace, see the comments of Monte (1966) and Kofler (1997:342-344) on Epist. 1.7:60-76, and (more interesting for our purposes) those on puns and indirect references to the Battle of Philippi at Gowers 2002:152-53.

Many poison experts have questioned the snake story, suggesting that a cocktail of strong but effective poisons may have made for a preferable exit (Retief & Cilliers 2005:87). Snakes, particularly cobras, however, which Cleopatra would probably have used, were of great significance to Egyptian royalty, since the uraeus ('cobra-head') on the Pharaoh's crown was viewed from early times as the protector of the monarch. The snake-bite did not, however, confer immortality, as is sometimes thought, because the Egyptian monarch was already believed to be an incarnate deity. Vergil always has two snakes trailing Cleopatra, symbolising for him the chthonic order opposing Augustus (see e.g. Aen. 8:697). Many scholars have suggested that the idea of a snake or snakes killing Cleopatra may derive from the imagery used in Augustus' triple triumph in 29 BCE. Waddle (forthcoming, ad loc.) remarks that Vergil may have derived his two-snake idea from seeing this triumph. Egyptian statues and other artefacts, however, have prompted Ashton (2001) to argue that Cleopatra VII made the triple uraeus her personal emblem (one-up-womanship over her sister Arsinoe, who had used the double uraeus as her symbol).

Some scholars have called into question the suicide story altogether, suggesting that the queen was quietly and conveniently murdered by Octavian. But, according to Suetonius (Aug. 17), Octavian was so keen to have Cleopatra live to be in his triumph that he employed members of an African tribe called the Poilis, who were apparently experts at sucking poisons out of wounds, to try to revive her 'since she was thought to have died from the bite of an asp'. Tronson 1998:41, 44-45 suggests that this piece of information may have come from Augustus' lost autobiography De vita sua, since it presents the princeps in an impressively merciful light. On Octavian's other supposed gestures of magnanimity, such as
‘Cleopatra Ode’, presumably written a few years after this, Horace controversially describes Cleopatra with some admiration as being brave enough to handle fierce snakes in order to absorb their black poison: \( fortis et asperas | tractare serpentis, ut atrum | corpore combiberet venenum \) (Odes 1.37.26-28).

There are striking parallels between the witch Canidia who inhabits Horace’s Epodes and Satires, and the historical Cleopatra, who came to be viewed (or at least to be presented) by Octavian and his allies, as the chief enemy of the Roman order. Cleopatra was herself repeatedly accused of bewitching Mark Antony by Octavian’s propaganda machine, which went into overdrive in the period leading up to Actium. Like Canidia, Cleopatra was also purported to have amassed a tremendous knowledge of effective poisons, one of which she may have used fatally on herself, to escape Octavian’s clutches.\(^5\) Cleopatra’s recently deceased ghost appropriately comes in last as the dinner’s ‘unexpected guest’, disguised as Canidia. Cleopatra’s death was not a defeat, but a victory, an escape from ignominy, according to the official version of events subscribed to by Horace, which is why she is easily associated with the triumphant Canidia.

Both Canidia and Cleopatra were viewed by Roman males as women who were taxing to men, who sapped their strength and ruined their lives and careers. Ellen Oliensis has extensively explored the extent to which, particularly in the Epodes, the appropriately-named Canidia is aligned with the dog-star (Sirius in Greek, but in Latin, Canicula) and its parching, sexually debilitating effects on men and concomitant empowering, arousing influence on women.\(^5\) Canidia is presented, especially in the final Epode, as dominant and triumphant, proposing to mount the passive and powerless (impotent?)\(^6\) Horace and ride him to victory (Epode 17.74-75). Likewise, the seductive, sexually potent Cleopatra was portrayed by Octavian’s spin-doctors as having a debilitating effect on both the morals and the career, if not the manhood, of the triumvir Mark Antony. Like Canidia’s triumph over Horace at the end of the Epodes, Cleopatra rode the hapless Antony to what she could only have imagined would be victory and enhanced power for herself and for Egypt. Although she

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allowing Antony and Cleopatra to be placed in the same tomb, see Johnson 1967:396.

\(^5\) Plut. Ant. 71.

\(^6\) Oliensis 1991:121-22 suggests that this is the case.
declines to pursue it further, Oliensis even comments on the connection: ‘Canidia is in a sense Horace’s personal Cleopatra.’\textsuperscript{61}

In person Cleopatra was not unknown to the Romans; she visited Rome many times during her lifetime, initially as the mistress of Julius Caesar. Recent investigations have suggested that Cleopatra VII may have been portrayed in artworks wearing, as a symbol of her status, the triple \textit{uraeus} crown or diadem, a headdress adorned with no less than three snakes, perhaps even in a Roman context.\textsuperscript{62} As the earthly representative of the goddess Isis, she may have also been surrounded by images of Egyptian gods, including the black dog-like jackal god Anubis.\textsuperscript{63} The Romans readily associated both snake headdresses and black dogs with witches,\textsuperscript{64} so those ready to see the negative in this threatening foreign

\textsuperscript{61} Oliensis 1998:77. More explicit is Henderson 1987:112-13, who makes a direct link between Canidia and the ‘unnamable’ Cleopatra, and sums up the post-Actium mood as a ‘world where, once more, Roman discourse could be reformulated through the scape-goating of a She-Devil.’

\textsuperscript{62} Although the triple \textit{uraeus}, it has been argued, often adorned Cleopatra’s brow in Egyptian-style statuary (see Ashton 2001), a blue glass intaglio in the British Museum (GR 1923.4-1.676 – Gem 3085), shows the bust of a woman, very likely Cleopatra VII, wearing such a headdress while styled and dressed in Graeco-Roman fashion. Romans were perhaps correct if they viewed the triple \textit{uraeus} as something threatening – some scholars have speculated that, in addition to the traditional ‘two kingdoms’ of Upper and Lower Egypt, represented by the first two cobras (originally by a vulture and a cobra), the third snake represented the ‘donations of Alexandria’, the Roman territories Mark Antony notoriously granted to Cleopatra and her children in 34 BCE.

\textsuperscript{63} Like Isis, the black jackal god Anubis was part of the Heliopolitan group of Egyptian gods. According to myth, the illegitimate son of Isis’ husband Osiris (through the deception of their sister Nephthys who appeared to Osiris in the guise of Isis), Anubis, together with Nephthys, assisted Isis in assembling the body of Osiris after the latter’s death and dismemberment at the hands of his evil brother Seth, and helped create the first mummy (Plut. \textit{De Iside et Osiride} 356; Watterson 1996:62-63). In reference to this story, one of the priests involved in the Egyptian mummification rituals always wore a mask of Anubis. However, statues of Anubis would probably have appeared to prejudiced Roman onlookers as just a big, rather sinister (black) dog. At Vergil, \textit{Aen.} 8.698, Anubis is described, in conjunction with all the other ‘monstrous’ Egyptian gods, as barking like a dog: latrator Anubis.

\textsuperscript{64} At \textit{Epode} 5.15-16 Canidia is sporting a hair-do made up of a tangle of short vipers: \textit{Canidia, brevibus illigata vipers} | crinis et incomptum caput. Her name itself gives a nod to the association of witches and dogs (Oliensis 1991:111). See also Sat. 1.8.34-35, where the Priapus relates: \textit{serpentis atque videres | infernas errare canis} (‘You could see snakes and dogs wandering around’).
queen may have found confirmation of their prejudices in Cleopatra’s outlandish dress and entourage. They would have been further scandalised by what they were told of her alleged behaviour and imagined intentions: she was, to conservative Roman eyes, a witch, if ever there was one.

I am not saying that Canidia is Cleopatra – I am merely suggesting that with the mention of an undesirable witch and fierce snakes in one breath in the year 30 BCE, and right at the end of Horace’s Satires, we are meant to think of Cleopatra and her death, which even at that time was recognised as marking the end of an era.65 The Canidia-Cleopatra hybrid is a destructive image, but it is also a finalising one,66 bringing an end to Horace’s Satires as she exhales poisonous fumes over Nasidienus’ cena. This is the last time that Canidia will visit Horace, and appropriately she carries with her all the bitter, black venom of the iambic tradition, a genre which she represents and in which her poisonous magic is triumphant, as at the end of the Epodes.67 The final figure in Horace’s Satires, Canidia-Cleopatra breathes her poisonous last over the cena, and dissolves this ultimate satiric gathering with her dying breath. Satire 2.8 is not simply a comedy of manners; it is a retrospective, a review both literary and political. The images and memories of the past fifteen years return to haunt Horace in this poem, as he prepares to move on.68

Bibliography


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65 This also marks the end of a genre for Horace, who never went back to satire after this, although he did revisit his sermones in a different form – that of the Epistles – many years later. It is interesting that Canidia herself also disappears from Horace’s works at this point, never to be seen again.

66 The theme of death is, of course, a common closural motif in literature (cf. the endings of the Iliad and the Aeneid).

67 On Epode 17, see Ollerus 1998:94-96; Barchiesi 2009.

68 The chief reason that someone would have for engaging in necromancy is a desire to know what the future holds amid the insecurities of civil war, many people apparently dabbled in this kind of thing, particularly the Pompeian faction (Du Quesnay 1984:38-39 = 2009:72-73). I think there is something of this in Sat. 2.8, which is in itself a type of necromancy. In doing so, Horace is ironically aligned with his enemy Canidia and others.
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Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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