

Satire I

In the course of this dialogue between the satirist and an anonymous interlocutor Persius says that he expects to have few readers because the Romans do not want poetry to have any bearing on real life. Fashionable verse is false and affected, written without a proper apprenticeship to the craft and designed solely to win applause. This decadence in literary taste is directly related to the general decadence in morals. Romans have lost their traditional virility. The satire ends with a list of certain types whom Persius does not hope to have as readers.

Ah, the obsessions of men! Ah, what an empty world!

'Who will read this?'

Are you asking me? Why, no one.

'No one?'

Well, perhaps one or two.

'Disgraceful! Pathetic!'

But why?

Are you worried in case 'Polydamas and the Trojan ladies' prefer Labeo to me? What the hell? If woolly old Rome attaches no weight to a piece of work, don't you step in to correct the faulty tongue on her balance. Ask no one's view but your own. Is there any Roman who hasn't – if only I could say it – but I can, when I look at our venerable hair and that austere demeanour
10 and all we've been at since we gave up marbles and assumed the

[wisdom

of disapproving uncles, then – sorry, it's not that I want to – but what can I do? It's my irreverent humour – I must guffaw!

Behind our study doors we write in regular metre, or else foot-loose, a prodigious work which will leave the strongest lungs out of breath. No doubt you'll finally read the product from a public platform, carefully combed, in a new white toga, with a birthday gem on your finger, rinsing your supple throat

Satire 1

with a clear preparatory warble, your eyes swooning in ecstasy. Then, what a sight! The mighty sons of Rome in a dither, losing control of voice and movement as the quivering strains steal under the spine and scratch the secret passage. You old fraud – collecting titbits for other men's ears – ears which will puff your skin out of shape until you cry 'Whoa
[there!]

'What's the point of study if that frothy yeast, that fig-tree which has once struck root inside never bursts out of the heart?'

So that's why you're pale and peevish! My god, what have we
[come to?]
Is it so futile to know things unless you are *known* to know them?

'But it's nice to be pointed out, and for people to say "that's him!" Isn't it something to be set as a text for a mob of long-haired schoolboys?'

Look, the Roman elite with well-filled stomach are inquiring over the port 'What has deathless verse to say?' Then a creature with a hyacinth mantle draped around his shoulders mumbles some putrid stuff through his nose, filtering out a Phyllis or Hypsipyle or some other tear-jerking bardic rot, letting the words trip prettily against his tender palate. The great men murmur approval. Now surely the poet's ashes are happy; surely the gravestone presses more lightly on his bones! The humbler guests applaud. Now surely violets will spring from those remains, from his tomb, and from his blessed dust!

'You're making fun,' he says, 'and curling your nostrils unfairly. Who would deny that he hoped to earn a place on the lips of the nation, to utter words that called for cedar oil, and to leave behind pages that feared neither mackerel nor incense?'

You, whoever you are, my fictitious debating opponent, if in the course of my writing something special emerges (a rare bird, I admit), but *if* something special emerges, I'm not the man to shrink from applause; my skin's not *that* tough.

But I do say your 'Bravo' and 'Lovely' are not the final
and ultimate test of what's good. For just shake out that 'Lovely'.
50 What does it not contain? Why Attius' *Iliad*'s there,
dotty with hellebore. Yes, and all the dear little elegies
improvised by crapulous grandees, all the stuff in fact
that is scribbled on citrus couches. You cleverly serve at dinner
hot sow's udders, give a threadbare coat to a shivering client,
then say 'I'm a lover of truth; tell me the truth about me.'
How can he? Shall I oblige? You're an airy doodler, baldy,
though your fat pot protrudes at least a foot and a half!
Janus, *you* have no mimic stork pecking you behind,
no hands held up to wag like hairy white ears, no tongue
60 stuck out like a thirsty dog's when his star is parching Apulia.
My noble lords, who must live with a blind rear wall in your skull,
run and confront the jeering grimace at your back door!

'Well what does the public say?'

What you'd expect – that poems
at last have a smooth-flowing rhythm; where the joint occurs, it sends
the critical nail skidding across the polished surface.
He *rules* each line, as if stretching a cord with one eye shut.
Our poet's Muse always provides him with great themes –
the royal way of life, perhaps, or its splendours, or its dinners!

Just look, we are teaching them to voice heroic sentiments –

70 who used to doodle in Greek! They haven't the skill to depict
a clump of trees or the well-fed land with its baskets and hearths
and pigs, and the hay smoking on Pales' holiday, from which
came Remus and Cincinnatus, who was polishing his share in the
[furrow
when his flustered wife, with a quorum of oxen, invested him
[Dictator,
and the sergeant took home the plough. Bravo my noble bard!

Nowadays one man pores over the shrivelled tome
of Accius the old Bacchanal, others over Pacuvius
and his warty Antiopa – 'a dolorous heart weighed down by woe'.

When you see myopic fathers brainwashing their sons like this,
is there any need to ask who's to blame for putting this sizzling
80 mish-mash into their mouths, and for that degrading rubbish
which makes our pumiced knights of the realm jitter on their seats?
You should be ashamed! Why you can't defend that venerable head
in court without eagerly listening for a murmur of 'Very nice!'
'You, Pedius, are a thief!' In answer Pedius weighs
the charges in trim antitheses and is praised for his clever figures.
'How lovely!' Well is it lovely? Or is Romulus wagging his tail?
Would that move me? If a shipwrecked mariner sang would I give him
a penny? Do you sing as you tote on your shoulders a picture of you
in the flotsam? Whoever would bowl me over will have to produce some
genuine tears, not rehearsed the night before. 90

'But the crude old verses have been given a new smoothness and
[grace.

A metrical role has now been assigned to "Berecynthian Attis"
and to "The dolphin slicing his way through dark blue
[Nereus",
and to "We stole a rib from the long spine of the Apennines."
"Arms and the man" – what desiccated, antiquated stuff that is,
like the branch of an old cork tree enveloped in cakey bark!

Well what is fresh, and good for reciting with limp-held wrist?
'They filled their frightening horns with Bacchanalian brays.
The Bassarid carrying the head torn from a frisky calf 100
and the Maenad ready to guide the lynx with reins of ivy
cry Euhoe! Euhoe! The shout's taken up by restorative Echo.'
Could such things happen if we cherished a spark of our fathers'
[spunk?

This emasculated stuff, this Maenad and Attis, floats on the spit,
always on the tip of the tongue, ready to come drooling out.
It doesn't pummel the back-rest or taste of bitten nails.

'But why do you feel obliged to rub the rasp of truth
on sensitive ears? Better watch it. You may get a chilly reception
from those baronial porches. Don't you hear the rolling r

110 of an angry dog?

From now let's say everything's white.

I don't care. Bravo! Superb! You're all just marvellous.

How's that? You erect a notice which says 'Refrain from shitting.'

Paint two holy snakes: 'This is sacred ground, my lads;

find somewhere else to piss.' I'm going. Lucilius crunched

the city – Lupus and Mucius and all – and smashed his molar.

While his friend is laughing, that rascal Horace lays his finger

on all his faults; gaining admission, he plays on the conscience –

so clever at holding the public up on that well-blown nose.

Am I forbidden to whisper – to myself – to a ditch – to anything?

120 Never mind; I'll bury it here in my book. I've seen it myself:

EVERY MAN JACK HAS AN ASS'S EARS! That's my secret;

that's my joke. Slight as it is, I still wouldn't sell it

for all your *Iliads*.

If you've caught the spirit of brave Cratinus
or are pale from devotion to angry Eúpolis and the Grand Old Man,
if you've an ear for a concentrated brew, then look at this.

I want a reader with his ears well steamed by that comic vinegar,

not the lout who is eager to jeer at Greek-style sandals,

and is willing to shout 'Hey one-eye!' at a man with that affliction,

who thinks he's somebody just because as Aedile at Arezzo

130 he has smashed a few short measures with full municipal pomp,

nor the witty fellow who sniggers on seeing cones and numbers

traced in the sand of the abacus, and is vastly amused if a Nones-girl

cheekily pulls a philosopher's beard. For them I suggest

the law reports in the morning, and *Calliroë* after lunch.

Satire 2

Men's secret prayers are discreditable and foolish, revealing an ignorant and debased conception of divinity.

Count this a red-letter day, Macrinus! Another year

rolls in to your credit. Pour a drink for your guardian angel.

You never try to do a deal with heaven, asking the gods

for things that you wouldn't dare to mention except in private.

But most of the wealthy offer incense from a silent casket.

Not everyone is ready to rid our temples of all that low

whispering and mumbling and to bring his prayers into the open.

'Good sense, good name, good character' – these words ring out for
[strangers

to hear; under his breath he privately mutters 'If only
uncle would pop off, what a splendid funeral we'd have!' 'If only
Hercules would let my spade thump on a crock of silver!' 10

'Although I'm his guardian, I'd like to rub that youngster out.

I'm next in line, and he's mangy and swollen

with jaundice.' 'That's his third wife that Neriis is burying.'

To make sure these prayers are holy you duck your head each

[morning
three times or more in the Tiber and wash away the night.

Well now, tell me – it's only a tiny point to clear up –
what's your opinion of God? Would you rate him higher than –

'Whom?'

Whom? Shall we say Staius? Or perhaps you balk at that?

Is there a finer judge, a more suitable guardian for orphans? 20

Well take this supplication, with which you are doing your best

to bend God's ear, and make it to Staius. 'Oh God!' he would cry,

'Good God!' So why shouldn't God himself cry 'Good God!'

Do you think you're forgiven when an oak is split in a thunderstorm
by the sulphurous bolt from heaven while you and your house escape?

You don't lie buried in a clump of trees where lightning has struck,
obeying the ritual of a Tuscan crone and her sheep's liver,
an object of dread and abhorrence. Does that mean Jove will let you
tweak his stupid beard? And what, may I ask, have you used
30 to bribe the ears of the gods? Offal and greasy guts?

Here we have a granny or superstitious aunt who has taken a baby
from his cot and now consecrates his forehead and dribbling lips
by smearing prophylactic spit with her horrible middle finger –
she's skilled at checking the searing blast of the evil eye.
Dandling the scrap of hope in her arms, in fervent prayer
she projects him into Licinian domains or the mansion of a Crassus.
'May a king and queen choose him as a husband for their daughter;
[may girls

scramble to get him; may roses appear wherever he treads!'

I'd never allow a nurse to pray for me. Refuse,

40 O God, to grant her requests, though she ask in her Sunday best.

You pray for strong muscles, a physique that won't let you down
when you're old. Fine, but huge platefuls of thick goulash
prevent the gods from granting your prayer and impede Jove.

You hope to build up your assets by killing a bullock; you summon
Mercury with its liver. 'Grant that my house may prosper;
grant growth to my flocks and herds!' And how is that possible,
fat-head, when the tripe of so many heifers melts in the fire?

Yet the fellow strives to prevail on heaven with piles of innards
and cakes: 'Now for more land, now for more sheep, yes now
50 my prayer will be answered, now!' till the coin left at the bottom
of the money-box, cheated and hopeless, heaves a sigh of despair.

If I brought you a present of silver bowls heavily embossed
with gold, you'd break into a sweat; in the left side of your chest
your heart would beat with impetuous joy, expelling the drops.
That's how you got the idea of smearing the faces of the gods
with gold proudly looted from the foe. 'Within that bronze
fraternity, those who send us dreams most clear of catarrh
should stand out from the rest. Let them have beards of gold.'
Gold has pushed out Numa's crockery and Saturn's copperware;

Vestal urns of Tuscan clay are becoming outmoded.

Souls bent on earth, devoid of the things of heaven!

What profit is there in carrying our ways into the churches,
using this sinful flesh to decide what's good for the gods?

The flesh has spoilt olive oil by mixing it into a perfume,
and soaked Calabrian fleece in unnatural crimson dye.

It's the flesh that drives us to gouge pearl from shell and rip
the veins of glowing ore out of the raw slag.

The flesh is guilty, yes guilty; but at least it *profits* from sin.

But tell me, you men of god, what use is gold in a church?

As much as the dolls which a young bride offers to Venus.

Let's give to the gods what mighty Messalla's bloodshot offspring

can't give from his mighty dish; a soul in which human

and divine commands are blended, a mind which is pure within,

a heart steeped in fine old honour. Let me bring *these* things

to the temple, and I'll win the favour of heaven with a handful of

[grain.

Satire 3

In the first half of the poem a lazy student, who represents Persius himself, is lectured by an older and wiser companion on the evils of sloth. In the second half (from v. 63 on) the address becomes more general. Sin is a form of disease; better nip it in the bud. Find out the true nature of human existence; forgo sensual pleasures; and live by the rules of Stoic philosophy.

'So this is your diligent study!'

The bright morning sunshine
is streaming through the shutters, widening the narrow chinks
with its light. My snores continue, allowing the fierce Faernian
to simmer down as the shadow nudges the fifth line
on the dial.

'Well, what's this?' says a friend. 'It's late. The mad
dog-star is baking the corn dry; the cattle are huddled
under the spreading elm.'

'Really? Are you sure? Hurry up, then!

Someone! Is nobody there?' My glistening bile swells up
and I burst. You'd think Arcadia's asses were braying in concert.
10 I reach for a book and the two-tone parchment with its hair removed,
also for some sheets of paper and a jointed reed pen.
First I complain that a thick blob is hanging from the nib.
I make the black stuff thinner by adding water, and then
complain that the pen deposits a series of runny drops.
'God help us! Things get worse every day. Has it come to this?'

'Ah, why not do like a pampered dove or a rich man's baby –
demand to have your din-din pre-chewed, and then throw a fit
of temper refusing to let your mammy sing you a lullaby?'

'How can I write with a pen like this?'

'Who are you kidding?

20 Enough of your snivelling excuses; it's your move. You're oozing

Satire 3

mindlessly away; you'll be rejected. When a half-baked jar is tapped,
the greenish clay gives a dull answer betraying its quality.

You are soft, damp, earth; away and have yourself moulded
on the whirling wheel till you're properly finished. Oh yes, your
[family

estate gives a fair yield; you've a pure and spotless salt-cellar
(no need to worry) and a comfortable dish for the rites of the hearth.
Is that enough? Or again, should you puff up your lungs till they burst
because you, descendant one thousand, trace your family tree
to Tuscan stock and parade for your Censor in full regalia?
Let the mob have your trappings; I know what you're like

30

[underneath,

in the flesh. Aren't you ashamed to live like sloppy Natta?
But vice has made him insensible; thick fat has surrounded
his conscience; he has no feelings of guilt, no notion of loss.
Lying on the bottom, he has ceased to send any bubbles to the surface.

O mighty father of the gods, when sadistic lust with its dagger
dipped in fiery poison incites dictators to crime,
may it please thee to punish their cruelty in this and this way only:
let them see Goodness, and waste with remorse at having betrayed
[her.

Were the roars which came from the bronze bull of Sicily more
[frightful,

and did the blade dangling from the gilded ceiling cause more terror
to the purple neck below than for a man to say to himself
40 "I'm falling, falling headlong!" and blanch in his heart, poor devil,
as he thinks of a crime which his own dear wife must never hear of?

'I remember as a youngster I often smeared olive oil on my eyes
to avoid learning the dying Cato's magnificent speech.
(I knew my moronic teacher would praise it highly, and my father
would listen in a sweat of excitement with the friends he had dragged
[along.)

Why not? My highest aim was to learn what I stood to win
from a treble six, what I'd lose on three ruinous ones,
never to let the narrow-necked jar avoid my marble,
never to yield first place at whipping a wooden top.

50

But *you're* no novice at spotting crooked behaviour and grasping
the doctrines of the learned Porch with its mural of trousered
[Persians –

doctrines swotted to the small hours by sleepless, crew-cut
students sustained by lentil soup and bowls of porridge.
Pythagoras' π betokens a young man's moral choice.
Your eyes are set on the path which climbs steeply to the right.
Still snoring! Your head's lolling, neck-joints undone
and jaws unfastened at both sides, yawning off yesterday.
60 Have you any goal to strive for? Any target to hit?
Or do you chase wild geese with stones and broken bottles,
not caring where your legs carry you, living at random?

'It's no use clamouring for hellebore when your flesh is already sick
and bloated. Nip the disease in the bud. Just what's the point
of promising the earth in fees to Doctor Cráterus? Listen,
you poor unfortunates, and learn the purpose of human existence –
what we are, what kind of life we are born to live;
which lane we have drawn; where we lean into the turn for home;
how much money's enough, what prayers are right, what advantage
70 are crisp notes, how much should be set aside for the state
and for your nearest and dearest; what role the lord has asked you
to play, what post you have been assigned in the human service.
Learn *this*; never mind those jars piled in a barrister's larder
as rewards for defending some greasy Umbrians, rotting beside
the pepper and hams ("tokens of gratitude" from a Marsian client)
while the first tin of sardines still contains a survivor.

'Here a sergeant-major – one of that smelly fraternity –
may say "I know all I need to know. The last thing I want
is to be like Arcésilas or a woebegone Solon – people who wander
80 about with head hanging down, their eyes fixed on the ground,
champing their silent mutterings in rabid self-absorption,
pushing their lips out to serve as a balance for weighing their words,
repeating over and over the dreams of a sick old fool:
'Nothing comes from nothing, nothing reverts to nothing.'
Is this why you're pale? Would this detain a man from his
[dinner?"]

That gets a laugh from the crowd, and the lads with the big muscles
send peals of merriment ringing through their contemptuous
[nostrils.

"Have a look," says the patient to his doctor. "I'm getting odd
[palpitations

here in my chest; I've a sore throat, and I'm short of breath.
Please have a look." He is told to go to bed. By the third night
his veins are flowing gently. So he sends a thirstyish flagon
to the house of a rich friend, requesting some smooth Surrentine
to drink at bath-time.

"I say, old man, you're a bit pale."
"It's nothing."

"Still, you'd better watch it, whatever it is.
Your skin's rather yellow and it's quietly swelling up."

"Your own colour's worse. Stop acting like nanny. I buried her
years ago; you're next."

"Carry on. Sorry I spoke."
Bloated with food and queasy in the stomach our friend goes off
to his bath, with long sulphurous belches coming from his throat.
As he drinks his wine, a fit of the shakes comes over him, knocking 100
the warm tumbler from his fingers; his bared teeth chatter;
suddenly greasy savouries slither from his slackened lips.
The sequel is funeral march and candles. The late lamented,
plastered with heavy odours, reclines on a lofty bed,
pointing his stiff heels to the door. He is raised on the shoulders
of men whose caps proclaim them citizens – as of yesterday.

You poor fool – just take your pulse and put your hand
on your heart.

"No fever here."

Feel your fingers and toes.

"They aren't cold."

What if your eye falls on a bundle
of notes, or you get an enticing smile from the pretty girl 110
next door? Is your heart-beat steady? You are served some tough
[vegetables

on a cold plate with meal shaken through a common sieve;
let's see your throat: very tender, with a septic ulcer at the back

which certainly mustn't be chafed by that rough proletarian beet.
You shiver when ghastly fear raises a crop of bristles
on your body; when a match ignites you, your blood boils, your eyes
spark with anger, and you do and say things which Orestes himself,
that archetypal madman, would swear were symptoms of madness.'

Satire 4

'The conceited young Alcibiades aspires to govern his country, although he manages his private life on the lowest principles.

'No one looks into his own soul. Instead we carp at the faults of others. As a result we in turn are open to malicious attack. Self-deception cannot be maintained indefinitely, and popular acclaim is unreliable. Examine your own soul and see how inadequate it is.'

The first twenty-two verses are supposed to be addressed by Socrates to the young Alcibiades. The latter, who was active in the last quarter of the fifth century B.C., represents the politician whose brilliance is not supported by moral integrity.

The setting is based on the pseudo-Platonic dialogue known as Alcibiades I.

Running the country are you? (The question comes from the bearded sage who was carried off by that deadly swig of hemlock.)

What are your qualifications – apart from being the mighty Pericles' protégé? Oh yes, your wisdom and grasp of affairs have developed ahead of your beard. You can estimate what to say and what to suppress. So, when the proles are seething with anger, you feel impelled to reduce the feverish mob to silence with a lordly gesture. And then what will you say? 'My friends, this, for example, isn't right; that's bad; but that is better.'

You know how to weigh justice in the double pans of the swaying balance; you can tell what's straight from the

[curves on either side
even when using a faulty set-square with crooked legs;
and you don't hesitate to condemn faults with a black x.
So why not doff that attractive skin (it does you no good),
and stop wagging your puppy's tail at the flattering rabble?
You'd be better to lower whole Anticyras of neat hellebore!
What's your idea of the highest good? To dine for ever
among the flesh-pots and pamper your skin with regular sunshine?
But wait – this hag will give the very same answer. Go on, then,
puff out your chest: 'I'm Lady Dinómache's son; and I'm
[handsome.'

Fine, but your motives aren't any higher than those of wizened old Baucis as she hawks her sexy herbs to a slob of a slave.

No one – absolutely no one – tries to delve into his heart; everyone watches the bag on the back of the man in front. If you ask 'Do you know Vettidius' place?'

'Which Vettidius?'

'The squire at Cures – the one with acres a kite couldn't cross.'

'Oh that damned creature. Even his own mother couldn't love him.

On a public holiday he hangs up his yoke at the cross-road shrines; reluctantly scraping the dirty old seal off his little wine-jar, 30 he groans "Cheers!" and downs the shrivelled dregs of his senile vinegar, munching an onion in its jacket with a pinch of salt. His slaves cheer excitedly at getting a bowl of porridge.'

But if, after an oil-rub, you relax, focusing the sun on your skin, a stranger appears beside you, digs you with his elbow, and spits abuse: 'What a way to behave, weeding your privates and the recesses of your rump, displaying your shrivelled vulva to the [public!

On your jaws you keep a length of rug which you comb and perfume; so why is your crotch plucked smooth around your dangling worm? Though half a dozen masseurs in the gym uproot this plantation, 40 assailing your flabby buttocks with hot pitch and the claws of tweezers, no plough ever made will tame that bracken.'

We shoot and in turn present a target to the barbs of others. That's how we live; it's the way we know. You've a hidden wound down in your groin, but it's covered by a broad golden belt. As you wish; tell lies to the nerves in your body and deceive them if [you can.

'But the neighbours insist I'm a splendid fellow. Am I not to [believe them?'

If you're so greedy that you turn pale at the sight of cash, if you do whatever occurs to your prick, if, although secure you repeatedly dun your debtors before the harsh tribunal, 50 there's no point in lending a thirsty ear to the public. Spit out what isn't you; let the crowd take back what they have conferred; live alone, and learn how sparse your furniture is.

Satire 5

'Poets conventionally ask for a hundred tongues.' 'But surely your verse is of a less pretentious kind.' 'It is, but I would gladly have a hundred tongues to express my gratitude to you, Cornutus; for you taught me the Stoic way of life.

'Only the wise man, who has subjected his impulses to the control of reason, can claim to be truly free.'

The satire has many points in common with Horace II. 7.

This is the poet's age-old cry: 'Give me a hundred voices, a hundred mouths, and a hundred tongues for my songs!' whether he's writing a play to be mouthed by a dismal tragedian, or showing a wounded Parthian pulling a spear from his groin.

'What's the point of all this? What lumps of nutritious verse are you cramming in, that you need a hundred throats to ingest [them?'

Bards committed to the elevated style may gather mists on Helicon – those who would bring Thyestes' or Procne's saucepan to the boil to provide a regular supper for tasteless Sweetman. You're different; you don't squeeze air from a bellows which gasps 10 as the furnace smelts the ore, or go in for hoarse and pent-up muttering, inanely cawing to yourself some deep observation, nor do you strain to blow up your cheeks until they go bang. You keep to the dress of everyday speech, clever at the pointed juxtaposition; you've a fairly well-rounded diction; you're expert at scraping unhealthy habits and nailing vice with a stroke of wit. Draw your material from there. Leave to Mycenae its menus of heads and feet, and get used to common food.'

It's certainly not my aim to swell my page with frivolities dressed in mourning in the hope of lending weight to smoke. 20 What I have to say is private; now, with the Muses' encouragement,

I'm offering my conscience to you, Cornutus, for a thorough
[inspection.

I want to show you, my dear friend, how much of my soul
belongs to you. Go on – tap it. You're adept at telling
what sounds solid from painted stucco put on by the tongue.
For this I *would* venture to ask for a hundred throats
to enable me to utter in clear tones how firmly I have tucked you
inside my heart's folds, that my words may reveal what lies
obscure and beyond expression within its deepest fibres.

30 On shyly removing the purple band which had kept me out of
[trouble,
and presenting my locket to the family gods in their old-fashioned
[clothes
(when a young man's friends are enticing, and his new white toga
[allows him

to run his eyes along the whole Subura at will,
when the road forks, and minds wandering in ignorance of life
are led in fear and confusion along the branching paths),
I put myself in your hands. You lifted my tender years
in your Socratic arms, Cornutus. Then, with quiet dexterity,
you laid your ruler down to straighten my erratic behaviour.
My mind struggled to submit as it felt the pressure of reason,
40 and under your thumb it took on the right form and features.
Together, I remember, we enjoyed those long and sunny days;
together we spent the early part of the night at supper.
The two of us planned a single scheme of work and rest,
and relaxed our serious concerns as we ate a simple meal.
Make no mistake about it, our days are held in tune
by a changeless law; from the first they have followed the same star.
Fate, with truth in its hand, holds our every minute
poised in the even Scales; or the hour which dawned when the loyal
pair was born has assigned to the Twins our harmonious lives,
50 and with Jove's help we are breaking Saturn's baleful power.
There is certainly *some* star which makes me congenial to you.

Thousands of human types: variegated life-styles.
Each with his own aim, all with different prayers.

Under an Eastern sun one man exchanges Italian
goods for shrivelled pepper and seeds of anaemic cumin,
while another lies replete and bloated in well-soaked sleep.
One is a sports fanatic, another gambles his shirt,
another is soft about sex. But then, when stony arthritis
smashes their fingers into the branches of an old beech-tree,
they moan too late that their days have gone by in a thick miasma, 60
with the sun choked by smog, and that they've turned their backs on
[life.

But *you* enjoy acquiring a pallor from your books at night.
Tending students like a farmer, you clear their ears and sow
Cleanthes' seed. From that young and old should draw
a ration for desire and supplies for their grey years of sorrow.
'Tomorrow will do for that.'

'Well do it tomorrow.'

'What?

A day's grace? That's a big concession!'

But when the next day dawns
we have finished yesterday's tomorrow, and look – a new tomorrow
is baling away our years; it will always be just ahead.
Although you are under the same carriage and close to the rim 70
of the wheel that revolves in front, it's futile trying to catch it,
for you are running in the rear position on the back axle.

We need *freedom* – not the sort which Jack acquires
when he appears as John Smith on the voters' list and is issued
with coupons for mouldy bread. You haven't a crumb of truth:
you create citizens by a whirl. Tom is a worthless yokel,
bleary with booze; you couldn't trust him with a bucket of mash.
Then his master turns him round; from that quick spin he emerges
Tom Jones. What's this? You won't authorize a loan
which Jones has endorsed? You quail at the sight of Jones on the 80
[bench?

It's true – Jones has said so! Would you sign this document, Jones?
This is the real freedom, this is what our caps give us!

'Well who can be called free, if not the man who is able
to spend his life as he chooses? I'm able to live as I choose;

am I not freer than Brutus?

'Your conclusion is false,' replies
the Stoic here, who has rinsed his ears with biting vinegar.
I grant the rest, but you'll have to remove that 'able' and 'choose'.

'I walked away from the Praetor and his rod as my own boss.
So why am I not able to do what I like – provided
90 it's not forbidden by a section of *Sabinus on Civil Law*?'

Very well, listen – but drop that angry screwed-up grimace
while I pull those weedy old granny notions out of your skull.
It wasn't in the Praetor's power to confer a delicate conscience
on fat-heads, or grant them a proper use of their hurrying lives –
it would be easier to train a ham-fisted bruiser to play the harp.
Common sense intervenes and gabbles softly in your ear
that no one should be let do anything that he's sure to make a mess of.
Human and natural law lay down a general rule
that ignorance and incompetence disqualify people from performing
[an action.

100 Do you mix a dose of hellebore if you can't adjust the weights
on a steel-yard? No – such an act is barred by the rules of medicine.
If a clod-hopping yokel who couldn't locate the morning star
tried to take over a ship, the gods of navigation would protest
that modesty had vanished from the world. Has philosophy taught
[you to live

a good upstanding life? Can you tell the true from the specious,
alert for the false chink of copper beneath the gold?
Have you settled what to aim for and also what to avoid,
marking the former list with chalk and the other with charcoal?
Are your wants modest, your housekeeping thrifty? Are you nice to
[your friends?

110 Do you know when to shut your barns and when to throw them
[open?

Can you walk steadily past a coin stuck in the mud
and not have to gulp down the Lord of Lucre's saliva?

When you can truly say 'I possess those goods, they're mine',
deem yourself free and wise in the sight of the Praetor and God.

But if, after just being counted as one of our batch, you retain
the skin of your old disguise and wear a glossy exterior
while keeping a cunning fox inside your vapid heart,
I revoke the concession I made above and draw in the rope.
It stands to reason you'll do nothing right. Waggle your finger
and you're wrong. Is anything smaller? But none of your incense
[will lead 120

the gods to place a gram of what's right in a fool's head.
It's against nature to mix them. If you're a clumsy oaf,
you couldn't do three steps of Bathyllus' satyr routine.

'I'm free.'

How can you say so when you're subject to so many things?
Do you know no master but the one which the rod lifts from your
[back?

'Here boy – run and take Crispinus' scrapers to the baths.'
If he shouts 'Well, you good-for-nothing loafer!' you aren't jabbed
into action by slavery, nor does any external force
galvanize your muscles; but if inside, in your sickly heart,
masters come into being, how do *you* get off more lightly
than the lad who ran for the scrapers in fear of his owner's strap? 130

It's daylight and you're lying snoring. 'Get up,' says Lady Greed,
'Hey, get up!' You won't. She persists, 'Up!'
'I'm unable.'

'Up!'

'What for?'

'What a question! Go and fetch kippers from
[Pontus,
plus beaver-musk, oakum, ebony, frankincense, slippery silk.
The pepper's arrived, unload it before the camel's had a drink.
Do a shady deal, then swear you haven't.'

'But God will hear.'
'Ha! Listen, you numskull, if you want God on your side
you'll spend your days happily scraping the bottom of the barrel.'

You're dressed for the journey, loading the slaves with bundles and 140
[wine-jars.

'Get this aboard right away!' The huge vessel is ready
to hurry you over the Aegean, when Luxury slyly draws you
aside for a word of advice: 'Where the hell are you off to?
What do you mean? Are you mad? Why a whole jar of sedatives
couldn't quell the frenzy that's raging in that hot head of yours!
You – hopping over the sea, having your supper on a bench
with your back propped against a coil of rope, while a squat mug
reeks of Veientine rosso ruined by stale resin!
All for what? That the cash you reared at the modest rate
150 of five per cent should strain to sweat out a greedy eleven?
Give yourself a treat; let's make some hay. What you live is ours.
Soon enough you'll turn into dust, ghost, and hearsay.
Live with death in mind; time flies – my words reduce it.'

Well then, two hooks are pulling in opposite ways.
Which will you follow, this or that? Your loyalty is bound
to vacillate, obeying and deserting each master in turn.
Even if you once succeed in making a stand and defying
their incessant orders, you can't say 'I've broken my bonds!'
For a dog may snap its fastening after a struggle, but still
160 as it runs away a length of chain trails from its neck.

'Davus, look – I really mean it – I intend to stop
the hell I've been through,' Chaerestratus says as he gnaws his nails
to the quick. 'Why should I bring disgrace to my decent relatives –
earning a bad name, squandering the family fortune
at the entrance to a house of ill repute, singing drunkenly
outside Goldie's dripping door with my torch doused?'

'Splendid my boy! Now take my advice and slaughter a lamb
for the gods who protect us.'

'But Davus, do you think she'll cry
[when I leave her?'

'Nonsense, my boy! She'll give you a whacking with her red
[slipper –
170 that'll teach you to struggle and gnaw at the tight net!
Now you're wild and fierce; if she called, at once you'd say:
"What'll I do? Not go near her, not even now

when she asks me – begs me?"

Not even now, if you've made a
[clean

and genuine break.'

There, I tell you, is the freedom we're after,
not in the piece of stick waved by a silly official.

Take the man who is flattered and enthralled by the glamour of
[the hustings –

is he his own master? Do without sleep, let the mob
scramble for showers of peas, so that old men in the sunshine
may one day remember our Festival of Flora. A fine aspiration!
But when Herod's birthday arrives, and lamps entwined with violets 180
are placed on the greasy window-sills spewing out heavy clouds
of smoke, and when the tunny's tail swims around, encircling
the cheap red dish, and the white jar is bloated with wine,
you move your lips in silence and blanch at the circumcised sabbath.
Demons in the dark, perils portended by an exploding egg,
Cybele's towering eunuchs, a one-eyed priestess of Isis
complete with rattle – they fill you with gods who will puff up your body,
unless on rising you take, as prescribed, three heads of garlic.

If you make such remarks in the presence of varicose sergeant-
[majors,
at once the mighty Pulfenius gives vent to a bray of laughter, 190
and bids a torn pound note for a lot of a hundred Greeks.

Satire 6

A letter from Persius, who is spending the winter on the Ligurian coast at Luna (modern Luni now inland off the Bay of Spezia), to the lyric poet Caesius Bassus.

After the preliminary greetings Persius takes up the topic of money, rejecting in the Horatian manner the way of the miser and that of the spend-thrift.

The main body of the poem, however, recommends that one should spend and enjoy what one has in a sensible way without worrying over much about the expectations of one's heir.

Has the winter brought you out to your Sabine fireside, Bassus?
Are the lyre-strings waking beneath your stern highland quill?
You excel at turning the oldest words of our tongue into verse
and setting them to the virile sound of the Latin harp.
Though old in years, you're an expert in the sport of young love,
playing with a tasteful touch.

The Ligurian coast is mild,
and I'm wintering here with my stretch of sea, where the cliffs present
a massive wall and the shore falls back in a deep gulf.
'Good people, get to know the port of Luna – it's worth it!'

- 10 So said Ennius the wise, on snoring off the dream
of being Quintus Homer descended from Pythagoras' peacock.
Here I couldn't care less for the toiling masses or the mischief
which the south wind is plotting for my cattle; couldn't care less
that a certain corner of my neighbour's land is richer than mine.
If all my social inferiors grew rich, I'd never become
hunched and shrivelled with resentment or forgo a tasty dinner,
or poke my nose at the seal of a bottle that's gone flat.
Others may differ. Twins born under the same star
vary in temperament. One, for a birthday treat, will dip
20 his dry greens in brine which he has cunningly bought in a cup;
he personally shakes the precious pepper on his plate. The other,

Satire 6

a stylish lad, chews through a huge inheritance. For me
it's 'Enjoy what you have', though I can't feed my dependants on
[turbot,
nor can I tell the subtle flavour of a hen thrush.
Live to your harvest; grind your granaries out, as you should.
Why worry? Harrow again, and a new crop's in the blade.

But you say you have obligations. A friend's ship has gone down;
he's clinging to the rocks of Bruttium, destitute – all his possessions
and his futile prayers committed to the deep; he's sprawled on the
[beach,
with the mighty gods from the stern beside him; the ribs of the 30
[dismembered
vessel are already drawing the gulls. Well, cut a sod
off your landed capital and give it to the poor fellow, to save him
from carting around his picture on a sea-blue board.

But your heir
will blame you for truncating your property; he'll skimp the funeral
[feast,
put your bones in the urn without scent. Is the cinnamon flat,
or the cassia debauched with cherry bark? He wouldn't know.
'Serve you right,' he'll say, 'for not keeping up the estate.'

Like Brutus, he blames it on Greek intellectuals: 'That's how it goes;
since these fancy ideas arrived from abroad with pepper
and dates, our farmhands have spoilt their porridge with greasy 40
[sauces.'

Will such things worry you beyond the pyre? But you, my heir,
whoever you are, may I have a word with you – here, in private?
I say – haven't you heard? A dispatch decked with laurels
has come from Caligula; the prime of Germany has crashed to defeat.
They're raking the cold ashes from the altars; the Empress has ordered
arms for the doorways, royal mantles, yellow wigs
for the prisoners, chariots of war, colossal figures of the Rhine.
So for these brilliant successes I'm staging a hundred fights
in honour of the gods and our beloved leader. Who's going to stop
[me?
Just try it. Turn a blind eye or else! I'm dishing out oil 50

to the mob – and bread and meat. Any objections? Speak up.
 ‘That field nearby,’ you say, ‘is too full of stones.’ Well if none
 of my father’s sisters or his brother’s daughters and none of my uncle’s
 great-great-granddaughters are left, and my maternal aunt has died
 without issue, if my granny’s line is extinct, I’ll go to the beggars’
 hill at Bovillae and in no time I’ll find some Jack for an heir.

‘An offspring of the soil?’

Ask who my grandfather’s grandfather was.
 It’ll take a while, but I’ll tell you. Go back a stage – and another;
 we’ve now reached a son of the soil. So in point of kinship
 60 this Jack turns out to be some kind of great-great-uncle.

You’re next; why shout for the baton before I’ve finished?
 I’m your Mercury, holding out the purse like the god in his picture.
 Do you refuse it? Or will you take what’s left and be thankful?
 ‘Some of it’s missing.’

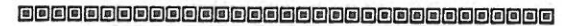
It went to meet my expenses. But all of it’s
 yours, whatever is there. Forget what became of the sum
 Tadius left me, and don’t call me to account: ‘Put down
 the sum inherited, add the interest, subtract the expenditure,
 what’s the remainder?’

Remainder? Come on, boy, drown the cabbage,
 drown it in oil and damn the expense! Shall I on holidays
 70 eat boiled nettles and a smoked pig’s cheek with a hook-hole in the
 [ear,

so that one day your young wastrel may gorge on goose’s liver,
 and when the fastidious vein throbs in his roving cock,
 relieve himself into an upper-class pouch? Am I to be left
 with a transparent skin, while his priest-belly wobbles with fat?

Sell your soul for profit, scour every quarter of the globe;
 clinch your smart deals; make sure that *you* are pre-eminent
 at standing on the hard platform and slapping fat Cappadocians.
 Double your capital.

‘I have; now it’s trebled; now
 it’s in four folds, now in ten. Pinpoint where I’m to stop
 80 and you’ll be the first man ever to have checked Chrysippus’ heap.’



NOTES