

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*

Form of work

Background to satire

- Ennius and Pacuvius:

Ennius seems to have been the first to start this genre: from the fragments of his work, it appears that he covered a mixture of topics such as gluttony and social parasites without including really harsh moral criticism.

After Ennius and Pacuvius, satire seems to have split in two traditions:

i) one engineered by Lucilius which led to Horace, Persius and Juvenal

ii) the other by Varro who was writing in the tradition of the Greek Cynic philosopher Menippus. C3rd BC Greek Cynic philosopher whose works are now lost: hence "Menippean satire")

cf. Diomedes (C4th AD) "a Roman verse form that has been in recent times abusive and composed to censure the vices of men in the manner of Old Greek Comedy, as was written by Lucilius, Horace and Persius; but formerly was the name given to a verse form made up of a variety of smaller pieces of poetry such as was written by Pacuvius and Ennius." (Latin in Keil ed. *Grammatici Latini* 1.485)

Quintilian *Inst.* 10.1.95 (C1st AD) "Another, older type of Satire, was written by ... Varro, the most learned of all Romans, in a mixed form not limited to different kinds of verse." (tr. Russell)

General features of Menippean satire

What we can surmise from the scant evidence is that Menippean satire was:

- mix of prose and verse
- mix of Latin and Greek
- criticism of social behaviour
- mix of comic and serious matter
- can include the fantastic

Note the mixed form is exploited by Seneca: amusing examples of grand verse inserted into prose and hence deflated; mix of tones; Latin/Greek provides humour (and Claudian himself mixed up the two); criticism of social behaviour presumably desirable; comic and serious: important points to be made about ruling?; the fantastic: offers great opportunity..

see:

Varro (writing satire c. 80-60BC) (only fragments surviving; topics e.g. literary criticism; attacks on luxury; discussions on philosophy)

Petronius *Satyricon* (?C1st AD, Nero's reign) (adventures of rogues)

Lucian (Greek, C2nd AD) (independent of Latin literary tradition)

Julian, *Caesares* (written 361 AD) (echoes of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*)

(set at season of the Saturnalia; narrator tells myth of Romulus giving banquet and inviting gods and emperors; some of emperors compete to be regarded as best)

310B-C "But when Claudius came in Silenus began to sing some verses from the Knights of

Aristophanes, toadying Claudius, as it seemed instead of Demos. Then he looked at Quirinus and said, 'Quirinus, it is not kind of you to invite your descendant to a banquet without his freedmen Narcissus and Pallas. Come,' he went on, 'send and fetch them, and please send too for his spouse Messalina, for without them this fellow is like a lay-figure in a tragedy, I might almost say lifeless.'"

Menippean Style in *Apocolocyntosis*

- proverbs (Eden on 1.1)
- Greek quotations, including Homer (Eden on 5.4)

Menippean Content in *Apocolocyntosis*

- **cosmic journeys:** Lucian writes about trips to heaven (e.g. *Icaromenippus* [Menippus goes to heaven and meets gods- same line of Homer quoted as in *Apoc.* 5.4]) and hell - though note such ideas in e.g. comedy
- **council of gods:** judgement and exclusion of gods seems to have been topic of Menippean satire: see Lucian *The Parliament of the Gods* (Olympian assembly attempts to purge aliens and interlopers; ends with decree that gods have to prove themselves);
 - though not exclusively Menippean: cf. e.g. epic tradition (reference to Ov. *Met.* in 9.5); Lucilius' *Council of the gods* (where gods pass judgement on dead Cornelius Lentulus Lupus)

NB Seneca is not just using because it appears in Menippean satire: obvious relevance given Claudius' abuse of law (not fair trial). Seneca plays up Roman setting to give added point: council like Roman senate which had okayed deification; in same procedure, Olympian senate reject the idea.