PLATONIC *PAIDEIA* IN THE NERONIAN SETTING: PERSIUS' FOURTH SATIRE

Persius is the least comprehensible and the most idiosyncratic Silver Latin author. Despite the growing body of commentaries and some incisive scholarship,[1] the function of his work within the cultural and political context of his times remains problematic. The present day reader finds it difficult to appreciate the remarkable enthusiasm for his poetry by Persius' contemporaries or, for that matter, in 17th and 18th century England. One assumes that this has to do not only with the obscurity of his language and the convolutions of his style, but as well with the aggressively moralistic character of Persius' discourse which seems alien to the culture of late modernity with its tendency to shun any kind of didacticism.

In an influential essay of 1966 William Anderson strongly argued to the effect that Persius' mode of satire ultimately represents its author's rejection of his society. It stands to reason, however, that before it could be rejected the society must have been experienced, engaged with, and visualized by the poet within the conventions of the genre. It is Persius' engagement with his cultural and

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[1] Kißel's commentary on Persius (Aulus Persius Flaccus, *Satiren*. Hg., übers. und komm. von W. Kißel [Heidelberg 1990]) provides an overview of Persian scholarship up to the date of its publication; see also M. Saccone, "La poesia di Persio alla luce degli studi piu recenti (1964–83)", *ANRW* II 32. 3 (1985). Three book-length studies of Persius' art in English – C. S. Dessen, *Iunctura callidus acri: A Study of Persius' Satires* (Urbana 1968), J. C. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire: A Study in Form and Image* (Cambridge 1974) and, most recently, D. M. Hooley, *The Knotted Thong: Structures of Mimesis in Persius* (Ann Arbor 1997), as well as the Italian monographs by Squillante (M. Squillante, *Persio. Il linguaggio della malinconia* [Napoli 1995]) and Bellandi (F. Bellandi, *Persio: Dai "verba togata" al solipsismo stilistico* [Bologna 1996]), are concerned almost entirely with formal aspects of his art, such as style, rhetoric and intertextuality. Among numerous articles, K. Reckford ("Studies in Persius", *Hermes* 90 [1962] 476 ff.) and W. S. Anderson (*Persius and the Rejection of the Society*, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe [15] (1966) 409 f.; repr. in his *Essays on Roman Satire* [Princeton 1982]) particularly stand out by offering helpful insights and formulations. Harvey's lengthy commentary (R. A. Harvey, *Commentary on Persius* [Leiden 1981]) is occasionally helpful.

political environment so far as it reflects on his chosen artistic medium that concerns me in this essay, and I hope that the argument I will be offering may help to elucidate certain peculiar aspects of Persius' procedures as well as some potential patterns of response on the part of his audience.

But even a cursory inquiry into the relationship of the poet's known work with what is known of his life runs into an immediate paradox. The extant biographical evidence as found in the anonymous *Vita* leaves no doubt of Persius' dissident affiliations.[2] The majority of the individuals mentioned therein had been, at one time or another, in trouble with the Imperial authorities. Thus, the poet's earliest instructors were the grammarians Q. Remmius Palaemon and the renowned Verginius Flavus (*Vita* 12 f.), the former was censored by both Tiberius and Claudius (Suet. *De Gramm.* 23), and the latter eventually exiled by Nero in connection with the Pisonian conspiracy (Tac. *Ann.* 15, 71). Furthermore, the *Vita* emphasizes the satirist's study with and loyalty to another future Neronian exile, the Stoic rhetorician Annaeus Cornutus[3] (which is fully confirmed by the contents and tone of the fifth satire) as well as his close friendship with Thrasea Paetus whose wife's distant relative he in fact was.[4] Persius was acquainted with both Lucan and Seneca, admired by the former (*Vita* 24 ff.) and unimpressed by the latter (27 f.),[5] which is hardly strange: the members of Thrasea Paetus' circle could well have

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[2] For the reliability of the *Vita* and the debates on its authorship, date and significance, see especially A. Rostagni's edition of Suetonius' minor biographies (Svetonio, *De Poetis e biografi minori*, Rest. e comm. di A. Rostagni [Torino 1944]) where the *Vita* is convincingly attributed to the grammarian M. Valerius Probus written only a few decades after Persius' death (167 ff.); the main reason for my belief that the text is reliable and that, even if written substantially later (which still is not sufficiently proved), it derives from the earlier authentic source, is the wealth of small biographical details which could not be invented (for instance, the exact location of the villa where Persius died; the references to his step-father, to his sister and aunt, and to his will, etc. Cf. Rostagni 167).

[3] 15 f.: *cum esset annorum sedecim amicitia coepit uti Annaei Cornuti, ita ut nusquam ab eo discederet*; also, in his will Persius left him much money and a huge library (*Vita* 40); on Annaeus Cornutus and his exile by Nero see V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero: The Price of Dissimulation* (London – New York 1993) 150 f., 298.

[4] 34 ff.: *idem decem vere annis summe dilectus a Paeto Thrasea est, ita ut peregrinaretur quoque cum eo aliquando, cognatam eius Arriam uxorem habente.*

[5] 27 f.: *sero cognovit et Senecam, sed non ut caperetur eius ingenio.*

frowned on what was seen as Seneca's opportunism. We are told next that Persius left his work unfinished and unpublished, and the *Vita* contains a curious piece of evidence that upon his death Annaeus Cornutus, together with the poet Caesius Bassus, advised the satirist's mother to destroy his *Iuvenilia,* among them a *praetexta*, a travelogue, and a verse encomium of the elder Arria who was Thrasea Paetus' mother-in-law.[6] This advice may have been based on the immaturity of these early writings, even as we learn that Lucan (admittedly, very young, but of precocious talent) was extremely enthusiastic about Persius' school-time recitations.[7] On the other hand, judging by their subject matter, all three compositions may have manifested a dissident *animus nocendi*. The *praetexta*'s title as found in the *Vita* makes no sense and is probably a result of the text's corruption; a topic from Roman Republican history could easily supply the youthful author with politically subversive material. Persius' early and life-long Stoic committment (his library is reported to have contained about 700 [sic!] volumes of Chrysippus – *Vita* 43 ff.) makes it likely that he would have chosen to treat his subject along the lines of Maternus' *Cato* from Tacitus' *Dialogus*. The travelogue may have pertained, at least in part, to his companionship with Thrasea Paetus,[8] whose vicissitudes by the time of Persius' death became so perilous that Annaeus Cornutus' desire to suppress such a text should not surprise. Finally, the poem on Arria would have had the most obvious impact by celebrating not merely an innocent victim of the Imperial terror, but a heroic suicide by the wife of a man who actually took part in the insurrection of Camillus Scribonianus against Claudius.

It appears, however, that Persius' six extant satires exhibit, at the first sight, no sign of politically subversive intent. His mockery of Caligula's sham triumph in AD 40 over the Germans (6, 41 ff.), which would have been of little relevance under Nero, is the

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[6] 51 ff.: *scripserat in pueritia Flaccus etiam praetextam Vescio* [?] *et Hodoeporicon librum unum et paucos in socrum Thraseae Arriam matrem versus, quae se ante virum occiderat. omnia ea auctor fuit Cornutus matri eius ut aboleret.*

[7] 24 ff.: *sed Lucanus mirabatur adeo scripta Flacci, ut vix retineret, recitante eo, clamare quae ille, esse vera poemata, quae ipse faceret, ludos.*

[8] Cf. Rostagni (n. 2) 175.

only point at which the satirist comes close to commenting critically on the Imperial form of government. The satires struck many as literary artifacts far removed from the real problems of real life.[9]

Indeed, despite the plethora of detail that is unmistakably Roman, Persius' Stoicized moralist critique of the society is emphatically abstract so that, for the most part, it could apply to any period of Rome's history, including Republican, or frequently enough even to the common faults of the human species. Thus his satires speak of the proper religious attitude (second), the rigors of philosophical inquiry (third), the need for self-knowledge (fourth), the true concept of freedom (fifth), and (with a surprising change of tone from extreme severity to greater lenience) one's right to spend one's money on moderate pleasures (sixth). Only the first satire stands apart as a trenchant criticism of contemporary literary habits and mores, but it is fraught with textual difficulties that require separate and special treatment.

One should not, however, yield to the temptation to explain away all idiosyncrasies of Persius' discourse by the author's exclusively stylistic and literary concerns divorced from the realities of the Neronian political and societal setting. A closer scrutiny of the material, from the particular perspective of what I called elsewhere the "rhetoricized mentality"[10] provides us with some further insight into the subtext of the satires. I have chosen Persius' fourth satire as a case study to suggest how this can be achieved.

It is not difficult to establish that the satire's first twenty two lines (out of fifty two) derive from the deutero-Platonic dialogue known as *The First Alcibiades*.[11] Both cases deal with the figure of Socrates instructing the young Alcibiades in the proper ways of statesmanship. *Prima facie*, this part of the satire seems to resemble in its purpose a school rhetorical exercise on a given theme: it is devoid of Persius' habitual confusion and collusion of the narrative voices – a matter which I will address later – and makes clear that the

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[9] Note, however, G. W. Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (Berkeley 1978) 282.

[10] V. Rudich, *Literature and Dissidence under Nero: The Price of Rhetoricization* (London – New York 1997) 1 ff.

[11] On the subject of the dialogue's authenticity, see e. g. P. Friedländer, *Plato*, transl. by H. Meyerhoff II (New York 1964) 348 f. For the sake of convenience I will be hereafter referring to the author of *The First Alcibiades* as Plato.

harangue belongs solely to Socrates even though within the latter's monologue (4, 3–22) Alcibiades is imagined as a rhetorical adversary to be quoted or refuted (4, 8–9; 20), and ridiculed. This portion of the satire, however, does not intend to imitate Plato. Rather, it represents a travesty of the original dialogue, that is to say, the displacement of its theme into an inadequate, or inappropriate, context.[12]

The argument of *The First Alcibiades* is firmly grounded in the social and political fabric of the Athenian democracy. Its emphasis lays on the relationship of an aspiring politician with the popular electorate – an issue of no immediate or practical relevance under the conditions of the Principate. That Persius was aware of this incongruence and its effect becomes apparent from his grafting the vocative *Quirites* onto a pronouncement to the Athenian audience which his Socrates ironically ascribes to his Alcibiades (4, 8).

The dependence of the fourth satire on *The First Alcibiades* was already noted as early as by the scholiasts. But no consensus had been ever arrived at as regards the function and purpose of that Platonic travesty within the satire's structure of meanings except of the recognition that both the author of the dialogue and Persius (in the satire's second, and apparently Roman, half) expound on the famous commandment of the Delphic oracle: "Know thyself".[13] What matters, however, is that there is no easily perceptible continuity between the two halves of the satire unless the reader not only recalls, but is continuously aware of the original dialogue with its emphasis on self-cognition as the poem's ultimate source of inspiration. Otherwise the "Athenian" and the "Roman" portions of the satire threaten altogether to fall apart.

Even though that same concern – "know thyself"– seems to furnish the common ground of the two texts, a further inquiry will reveal that in terms of intertextuality the divergencies between them prove no less significant than their affinity. Naturally, the poet had to compress fifty or so pages of the Socratic argument into two

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[12] For the definition of travesty, see Rudich (n. 3) 192 f.

[13] See e. g., Kißel's ([n. 1] 496) critique of Ehlers' (W. W. Ehlers, "Sokrates und Alkibiades in Rom. Persius' vierte Satire", *Filologia e forme letterarie. Studi offerti a F. Della Corte* III [Urbino 1987] 419–429) and Peterson's (G. R. Peterson, "The Unknown Self in the Fourth Satire of Persius", *CJ* 68 [1972–1973] 205 ff.) attempts at the satire's interpretation, the former disregarding the sharp difference between two halves of the text, and the latter reading the second half as Alcibiades' response to Socrates.

dozen lines which could not but interfere with the resulting product, as regards both its intellectual design and literary effect. But these and similar structural considerations still do not account for all striking contrasts between the dialogue and the satire.

The first major deviation from the Platonic model is Persius' portrayal of Socrates. In Persius, the speaker berating the young Alcibiades resembles a crude moralist of Cynic (not even Stoic) mold rather than the soft-spoken and charismatic Athenian sage. (Note the word *barbatum*, 4, 1 as the only prominent feature mentioned of that speaker's appearance. Indeed, beards found, for the most part, little appreciation among the Romans of the late Republic and the early Empire. Tradition made beards the primary attribute of a Greek philosopher, even though by the time of Persius' writing they came increasingly to signify the Stoic and Cynic teachers.[14] Within the Neronian ambiance, on the other hand, cultivation of a beard may have ambivalently drawn on both the non-Roman and the fashionable – it suffices to remember that Nero was the first and only of the Julio-Claudians to sport a kind of a beard.) The whole tenor of Socrates' speech in Persius is characteristically rude and far removed from the celebrated subtlety of Socratic irony. The very first words of the satire – *rem populi tractas* (4, 1) were given obscene meaning by some interpreters.[15] Even if this may go too far, it does not surprise given our satirist's penchant for coarse sexual imagery.

Both in the dialogue and in the satire Socrates questions the young Alcibiades' ability to make correct statements on matters of justice and derides his plan to address the people's assembly. But in Persius mild irony is replaced with sarcasm, increasingly hostile and often heavy-handed, as for instance, in lines 5–7:

> ergo ubi commota fervet plebicula bile,
> fert animus calidae fecisse silentia turbae
> maiestate manus.
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> Thus, when the riff-raff is fervent with bile, the passion to act

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[14] Note esp. Sen. *Epist.* 5, 2; 48, 7; Quint. 11, 1, 34; 12, 3, 12; Plin. *Epist.* 1, 10, 6; Mart. 4, 53, 3 f.; 11, 84, 7; 14, 81, 1; 9, 47; Juv. 14, 12; Muson., p. 114 ff. Hense.

[15] Cf. e. g. Dessen (n. 1) 66; W. T. Wehrle, *The Satiric Voice: Program, Form and Meaning in Persius and Juvenal* (Hildesheim – Zürich – New York 1992) 51.

> compels you to make silent the heated crowd by a majestic gesture of your hand.

This language of cheap abuse regarding the common man is decidedly un-Socratic and un-Platonic, all the anti-democratic sentiments of the historical Socrates and Plato notwithstanding. This is the language of a Roman who identifies with the senatorial tradition of the *optimates*. This tone and context make polyvalent the vocative *Quirites* at the end of the line: by introducing an explicitly Roman element, it also conveys the satirist's contempt for the Roman mob. The disdain for popular support and those who seek it is reinforced a few lines later through a metaphor that perhaps better yields a prurient interpretation: *quin tu igitur ... / ante diem blando caudam iactare popello / desinis* (4, 14–16). The earlier reference to the customary usage of the letter θ signifying death sentence does not intend to re-emphasize the Greek element at the expense of the Roman: in Rome, that letter could be inscribed on funeral monuments as well as used by grammarians to indicate indecent words or passages in literary manuscripts (cf. Hor. *Ars* 446 f.). Thus Persius creates a clever double-entendre which tellingly connotes politics and literature.

It is, however, in his treatment of the relationship between the interlocutors that Persius diverges even further from his model. The narrative of *The First Alcibiades* illustrates an exemplary Socratic erotico-political *paideia*. The very first sentence of the dialogue makes Socrates declare his love for the son of Cleinias (πρῶτος ἐραστής σου γενόμενος). Towards the end of the discussion Alcibiades implicitly reciprocates when to Socrates' remark that he, Socrates, is the one who faithfully remains his lover even though the prime of Alcibiades' body is over, the latter responds: "Yes, and I am glad of it, Socrates, and hope you will not go" (131 d). Persius' attitude to the same sex relationship, on the other hand, appears consistent and persistently hostile. In fact, the description of a decadent poet in the first satire who is identified as a homosexual prostitute (1, 15 ff.)[16] belongs among the most obscene passages in Latin literature. Indeed, one may argue that there must be a difference in kind between the philosophized eroticism of Socratic mold and homosexual involvement, but it does not seem that the satirist recognized any such nuance. Anyway, Persius' portrayal of his own

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[16] Cf. Dessen (n. 1) 35 f.

friendship with his teacher Annaeus Cornutus in the fifth satire (5, 21–51) is drawn as emphatically spiritual and non-erotic. The Socrates of the fourth satire treats his interlocutor by no means as an ἐρώμενος, but as a rhetorical adversary to be mocked and despised. Ridiculing the young man's concern with his appearance (*summa nequiquam pelle decorus* etc.– 4, 14 f.; cf. 20) rudely travesties the passages in the dialogue (e. g., 119 c; 135 c) where Socrates implies, with gentle irony, the contrast between Alcibiades' physical beauty and mental ineptitude; and a jab at his habit of sun-bathing (*adsiduo curata cuticula sole* – 4, 18) relates him to the repellent figure of an effeminate voluptuary in the satire's second part shortly to be examined.

Finally, the dialogue and the satire vastly diverge in the resolution of their respective arguments, which only in part can be explained away by the difference in genre. In the dialogue, the Socratic *paideia* is entirely successful. Not only has Alcibiades to agree with all that his philosophical suitor suggests, but he is made to announce:

> And yet I say this besides, that we are like to make a change in our parts, Socrates, so that I shall have yours and you mine. For from this day onward it must be the case that I am your attendant, and you have me always in attendance on you (135 d; Loeb translation).

Persius offers nothing of the sort: at the end of his Platonic travesty, Alcibiades' stupidity is underscored by the claim that despite his noble origin and handsome features (cf. 4, 20: *'Dinomaches ego sum' suffla, 'sum candidus'*), he is no better in his judgement than an old country woman bargaining with a lazy slave (21 f.: *dum ne deterius sapiat pannucia Baucis, / cum bene discincto cantaverit ocima vernae*).

Before attempting to situate the Socratic portion of the fourth satire in a Neronian context, one needs to consider the satire's second half (lines 23–52) and its possible relationship with the first. This confronts us necessarily with the thorniest problem of Persian scholarship – the confusion of voices within his narratives.

In my judgment it is not possible, despite the attempts of some editors and interpreters,[17] to construe the second part of the satire

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[17] Most consistently, Persius, *The Satires*. Text with transl. and notes by J. R. Jenkinson (Warminster 1980) ad loc.; cf. Peterson (n. 13).

as a continuation of the debate between Socrates and Alcibiades because of the obvious change in the setting. It now becomes unmistakenly Roman, as is apparent from the use of nomenclature (Vettidius – 25) and geography (Cures – 26). As regards the distribution of the verses between the voices of the narrator and the interlocutor, I prefer to read the first two lines (4, 23 f.: *ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo, / sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo!*) represent the voice of the author. Then he engages in an exchange with an adversary where the words *cuius* (line 25) and *hunc ais* (line 27) belong to him, and the rest to his interlocutor who denounces their common acquaintance for avarice (lines 27–32). After another short authorial intervention (lines 33–35) the adversary is in turn exposed as an effeminate voluptuary by the imaginary third party (*ignotus*, 4, 34), presumably, a passerby (lines 35–41).

The purpose of the satirist's argument at this point is the same as in last portion (128–135) of *The First Alcibiades*, namely, an elaboration on the oracular commandment "know thyself". The treatment of this theme in Persius is, however, very different from that in the dialogue, where it is conducted through the customary Socratic procedure of questions and answers, and in terms of the relationship between the body and the soul. Instead, the satire, with a telling twist of emphasis, concentrates on the human tendency to slander others without any recognition of one's own lack of worth: *tecum habita: noris, quam sit tibi curta supellex* (4, 52).

The telos of this argument – reflection on one's own self vis-a-vis the other – is in fact closer in meaning to the query of the Gospel (And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [Mt. 7, 3]) rather than to the Delphic pronouncement which requires no more than direct introspection.

From what is said so far it follows that the conceptual unity of the satire can be fully appreciated only by a reader familiar with the Deutero-Platonic dialogue which, bearing upon both the Socrates–Alcibiades exchange and the matter of self-knowledge, constitutes the satire's extra-textual frame of reference. The chief artistic link, on the other hand, between the satire's two parts is provided by the peculiarly perverse sexual imagery. Even though it is not obvious to me that, as some modern interpreters insist,[18]

[18] Cf. Dessen (n. 1) 67 ff.; Harvey (n. 1) 23 ff.; cf. 117 ff.

the grotesque figure of the depilated exhibitionist purports to satirize a demagogue as prostitute, it apparently shares with the earlier portrayal of Alcibiades such characteristics as pretentious narcissism and passion for sun-bathing (*figas in cute solem* – 33 and *assiduo curata cuticula sole* – 18; cf. *blando caudam iactare popello* – 15 and *penemque arcanaque lumbi / runcantem populo marcentis pandere bulbos*[19] – 35 f.). The sexual innuendoes continue to recur, now in the authorial voice, almost till the end of the poem (cf. 4, 48: *si facis, in penem quidquid tibi venit*).

At the same time I find it significant that the picture of the dissolute exhibitionist in satire four gestures towards the first satire with its obscene caricature of a Neronian poet as the *cinaedus* (1, 13–23) and Neronian poetry as the equivalent of sexual depravity.

Attempts to fit the fourth satire into a Neronian political context date as early as 1605 (Isaac Casaubon) and kept sporadically recurring throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For the last few decades, however, this approach fell decidedly out of fashion, due to the fact that there is very little to relate the personages borrowed from Plato to those active in Persius' lifetime, and thereby justify the idea that the former were employed by the satirist with the purpose of attacking the latter.[20] But this overlooks

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[19] I read *bulbos* with Richter rather than the manuscript *vulvas*.

[20] Of the more recent anti-Neronian interpretations of the satire, only Bo (D. Bo, "Persio e l'opposizione antineroniana", *Filologia e forme letterarie. Studi offerti a F. Della Corte* III [Urbino 1987] 416 f.) seeks to substantiate such contention with at least some relevant details, although his position and the present argument share very little. (Bo recognizes that Nero could have been intended in Persius' portrayal of Alcibiades, but he sees in Persius' Socrates merely a generalized type of a Stoic philosopher, more principled than Seneca: cf., along the same line, A. Bartalucci, "Persio e i poeti bucolici di età neroniana", *Miscellanea di studi in memoria di M.Barchiesi* I [Milano 1976] 91: "Socrate dà l'impressione di essere un filosofo stoico, assai piu severo di Seneca, che ammonisce un Alcibiade, i cui tratti sembrano tutti quelli di Nerone".) Ehlers (n. 13) reads the satire as addressing young Roman nobles aspiring to a career in politics, cf.: "Alkibiades ungefähr entsprehende römische *nobiles*" and thus functions "als Chiffre für Persius' Adressaten" (425 f.). Peterson (n. 13), somewhat perversely, sees the telos of the satire as an admonition *against* the descent into the self: "the psychic cost may be too high" (208). Henderson (J. G. Henderson, "The Pupil as Teacher: Persius' Didactic Satire", *Ramus* 20 [1991] 123–148) postulates, in predictably post-modernist fashion, that Persius' intent (in all of his satires) was to subvert and even reverse the customary roles of teacher and pupil in the educational

the possibility that the contrast itself, even if it is not explicitly articulated, was intended to provide the reader with an opportunity for politically charged response. This pertains, in the first place, to the poet's choice of democratic Athens as the scene against which to play out the debate on morals in politics. What may be called an "apophatic" device, which alludes to the reality of the moment by describing what it is not, was apparently known to Persius' contemporaries. Thus Seneca could decry solicitation of popular votes, as if such a practice continued into his own day, both he and his audience fully knowing that this was not the case (*Epist.* 118, 3):

> Quam putas esse iucundum tribubis vocatis, cum candidati in templis suis pendeant et alius nummos pronuntiet, alius per sequestrem agat, alius eorum manus osculis conterat, quibus designatus contingendam manum negaturus est, omnes attoniti vocem praeconis exspectent, stare otiosum et spectare illas nundinas nec ementem quicquam nec vendentem?

> Do you really find it pleasant – when, the tribes summoned, the candidates make offerings in their temples, this one promising money, the other acting through an intermediary, or covering with kisses the hands of those whom otherwise, upon being elected, he would refuse a mere touch, and all anxiously await the words of the herald – to watch leisurely this job market without anything to buy or sell?

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process. The main point that Henderson has to make on the message of the fourth satire and its relation to the reality, is expressed as follows: "In this, Persius' revisionary review, Socrates, as well as Alcibiades, is squarely on the receiving end. They are each other's *alter ego* / ... / And so are we, these are the 'Seneca' and the 'Nero' in each of us" (p. 134). I find this entire style of reasoning highly speculative and, for the most part, irrelevant. Much of the same applies to Freudenburg (K. Freudenburg, *Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal* [Cambridge 2001]), who formulates his position as following: "My point in raising the issue here is neither to insist that Nero really is 'in' the poem as its target, thinly veiled, obvious, or otherwise. Nor, conversely, to argue that readers are wrong to find him there" (p. 190). Instead he treats the text in terms of reader-response criticism, however idiosyncratic, as for instance: "For by following this poem's many 'Neronian' leads, hand-in-hand with our own generically encoded desires for what we want it to say, we make Nero the target, and the butt of the joke. And thus, the joke is on us. We have allowed ourselves to hear the poem's insults hurled at *him*, thus locating the saddle-bag strapped to *his* back, without considering the load that weighs heavily on our own" (p. 191; italics Freudenburg's).

The purpose of this rhetorical mechanism is twofold: to alert the reader to an issue that cannot be explicitly spelled out (in both Persius and Seneca this is the virtual cessation of popular elections under the Principate, despite a Republican facade) and at the same time to provide the author with an outlet for 'plausible deniability', that is to say, a contention, if the circumstances required it, that his moralist or satirical agenda had nothing to do with the given Imperial policies of the time.[21] From this perspective, the very disparity between the fourth satire's context (Athenian democracy) and its construable subtext (Neronian Rome) could be taken as a sign of its author's 'subversive intent' – the *animus nocendi*.

It is humanly natural to look for a concrete, individual, and immediate target in any satirical or moralist discourse, however generalized the author may claim his purpose to be. The Romans were particularly quick in reading an allusion, especialy pejorative, to a contemporary event or personality (*interpretatio prava*) even in texts where it was not intended at all. Thus, when a comedy actor made a pun using the word *cinaedus* to signify the priest of Cybele, the theater's audience instantly interpreted it as a reference to Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 68)[22] – this may have been an after-effect of Antony's abusive propaganda campaign against Octavian during the last round of civil wars.[23] That a pointed and topical offence could be found in texts of ostensibly – and generically – moralist character, such as fable or satire, does not surprise. One remembers, after all, that the first Roman satirist Lucilius (whom Persius admired – cf. 1, 114 f.) was known for attacking in verse his personal enemies.[24] We know, furthermore, that Sejanus was offended by something he found in Phaedrus' fables and threatened their author with some unspecified disaster (Phaedr. 3, Prol. 41 ff.), with the result that the fabulist later thought it imperative to make a special disclaimer: *neque enim notare singulos mens est mihi, / verum ipsam vitam et mores hominum ostendere* (*ibid.*, 49 f.: "It is by no means my in-

[21] For 'plausible deniability', see Rudich (n. 10) 15 f.

[22] The same mechanism of politically topical *interpretatio prava* could work even regarding the texts written long in the past, cf. Tiberius' response to the elder Agrippina quoting Euripides (Dio 59, 19).

[23] See e. g. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 276 ff.

[24] See e. g. Lucilius, *Satiren*. Lat. und deutsch von W. Krenkel. I (Leiden 1970) 21 ff.

tention to condemn individuals, but indeed to expose life itself and the mores of men").[25]

Now, the only conspicuous example of an attempt at political *paideia* in the Platonic mold during Persius' lifetime was Seneca's relationship with Nero as *praeceptor principis*, and it seems to me beyond doubt that a contemporary reader would recognize this archetypal resemblance. The apparent, even considerable, difference in detail between the characters and stature of the Greek and Roman protagonists is consequently one of the devices, characteristic of travesty, of distancing a personage from a model, and besides enhancing the potential of 'plausible deniability' in case the text falls into the hands of a malevolent censorious interpreter.[26] This particular technique of subversion that defeats implicit similarities by explicit contrasts, and vice versa, was successfully employed, for instance, by Petronius in the portrayal of Trimalchio which is construable as a travesty of Nero.[27]

All differences granted, however, there remain enough elements in Persius' fourth satire, pointing towards Seneca and Nero, to entertain the members of Persius' circle (who may well have resented the philosopher's lack of principle) or, upon its posthumous publication, a dissident reader hostile to the Emperor or his tutor. In fact, the very exhortation against courting popular support, that the satirist places in the mouth of his Socrates, could be appreciated by his immediate audience as a reference to Nero's well-known urge for popularity and success in acting on stage: the correlation between the figures of a demagogue and an actor adds a further irony.[28]

I have mentioned that in the first satire Persius makes use of sexual imagery as a metaphor for the fashionable poetry of the period. Within the Neronian ambiance, sexuality, and especially homosexuality, emerged as a theme politically *markiert*, given its prevalence at the Imperial court even in the early years of the regime: the narrow coterie of politicians and literati had material for gossip in

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[25] Cf. V. Rudich, "Navigating the Uncertain: Literature and Censorship in the Early Roman Empire", *Arion* 14 (2006): 1, 21 f.

[26] See Rudich (n. 10) 15 f.

[27] E. g., *ibid.*, 238 ff.

[28] Bartalucci (n. 20) 91 suggests that Alcibiades' self-appellation *Dinomaches ego sum* (4, 20, even though it echoes the dialogue's Δεινομάχης υἱός – 123 c) implied an innuendo regarding Nero's dependence on Agrippina; cf. Bo (n. 20) 417.

the young Nero's relationship with his companion Otho, and in the rumors, reported by Tacitus, alleging that Nero sexually violated his step-brother Britannicus (*Ann.* 13, 17). Furthermore, as follows from Dio (61, 10), Seneca was himself a subject of scandalous gossip to the effect that he corrupted Nero sexually – the reverse of the image Seneca tried to uphold – of a philosophical sage educating the future *rex iustus*. It must be observed, on the other hand, that he came close to acknowledging his affairs with young men at the end of the extant text of the *De Vita Beata* (27, 5):

> mihi ipsi Alcibiadem et Phaedrum obiectate, evasuri maxime felices cum primum vobis imitari vitia nostra contigerit.
>
> Upbraid me with an Alcibiades and a Phaedrus, but it will prove your happy moment when you get to imitate my own vices.[29]

Here an implicit comparison (and potential identification) of Seneca with Socrates is already apparent. But, as we saw, in the satire (unlike the dialogue) the Socratic pedagogic fails, and this suggests, by virtue of association, that its newest re-enactment at the Palatine with Nero will fare no better. In turn, this implies that Seneca, even though he remains unnamed, was no more than a pseudo-Socrates, an imposter.[30] This also demonstrates Persius' own profound distrust of the erotico-political *paideia*, even in the original Platonic sense, as contrasted with the ethico-philosophical *paideia* that is the content of the fifth satire, where he movingly describes his own education at the hands of the Stoic master Annaeus Cornutus, who is shown, perhaps in deliberate juxtaposition to satire four, as Socrates redivivus (cf. 5, 36 f.: *teneros tu suscipis annos / Socratico, Cornute, sinu*).

As I pointed out earlier, the second part of satire four re-formulates the Delphic commandment "know thyself" in terms of the need for self-reflection vis-a-vis the other (cf. 4, 23 f.: *...nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo, / sed praecedenti spectatur mantica*

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[29] Tellingly, the late scholiast, on the basis of this satire, as he read it, and against the historical truth, contends (ad 4, 1) that Socrates had been indicted and executed for his love affair with Alcibiades: *hic autem Socrates, cum incriminaretur de turpi amore Alcibiadis discipuli sui, venenum in carcere accepit quo puniretur.*

[30] *Contra* e. g. Wehrle (n. 15) 45 ff., who treats Persius' Socrates as one of the satirist's own masks.

tergo!). In a rather complicated manner, it portrays a rhetorical adversary who, guilty of *luxuria*, denounces another person ('Vettidius' ll. 25 ff.) for *avaritia*, only to be chastised as a voluptuary by a third party (ll. 34 ff. *ignotus*, 'a passer-by'). The logic of this satirical strategy requires that all three figures, not only the miser and the sunbather, but equally the self-righteous *ignotus*, must be recognized as immoral and incapable of knowing their own faults.

I find it likely that Persius was provided with an inspiration for this particular train of thought by a contemporary event – namely, the prosecution and trial of the notorious Publius Suillius Rufus.[31] A much hated and feared *delator* under Claudius, Suillius found himself upon Nero's accession stripped of his former influence in the affairs of state. Suffering from what he saw as disgrace, he proceeded with a vociferous defamatory campaign against Seneca as the architect of the new regime. In Tacitus' words (*Ann.* 13, 42),

> Suillius did not abstain from either complaint or vituperation, feeling free to speak not only because of the ferocity of his spirit but also because of his extreme old age, and assailing Seneca as an enemy of Claudius under whom he had suffered very well deserved exile.

He charged Seneca with whole array of vices and misconduct, such as parasitism, usury, hypocrisy and, finally, debauchery in the Imperial apartments (*ibid.*: *cubicula principum feminarum*), this last claim apparently referring to the philosopher's adulterous affair with Caligula's sister Livilla for which he was exiled to Corsica under Claudius (41 AD). It appears very probable that Seneca's self-justification in the *De Vita Beata* (from which I quoted a passage on homosexuality) was in fact intended as a response to Suillius' attack.[32] It is worth observing that, at Seneca's instigation, Suillius was first prosecuted on a charge of provincial extortion (*de repetundis*) – and only after that did not work, for his "crimes committed in the capital" (Tac. *Ann.* 13, 43), that is to say, the destruction of innocents by means of intentionally false denunciations. In the course of scandalous hearings, Suillius was finally found guilty and sent into exile (*ibid.*).

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[31] See Rudich (n. 3) 26 f., 267 f.; idem (n. 10) 17 f., 88 f.

[32] Rudich (n. 10) chapter 1, section 12.

One doubts that Persius' intimate circle of Stoics and Stoicizers approved of Seneca's role at Nero's court. At best, they considered it opportunistic, and at worst the source of corruption. Even during the "golden five years" (*quinquennium Neronis*),[33] Seneca's political survival depended on his willingness to compromise with the young Nero's excesses (cf. Tacitus' comment that Seneca and Burrus sought "to restrain better the princeps' slippery young age – in the event he spurned the path of virtue – allowing it a sort of pleasure that was permissible"– *Ann.* 13, 2).[34] Where the distinction lay between permissible and not permissible pleasures, however, was a matter of opinion. One also recalls that the *quinquennium* saw Nero's murder of Britannicus. There is some evidence of friction between Seneca and Thrasea Paetus,[35] and I already mentioned that, according to the *Vita*, Persius himself was not impressed by the philosopher upon their acquaintance. Against this background, it can be surmised that in the satirist's eyes, both antagonists, Seneca and Suillius, represented immoral types trying to impeach each other on charges of immoralism – which makes a close parallel to the quarrel of immoralists as portrayed in the second part of the fourth satire. That the import of the argument, namely, that one should concentrate on one's own faults, and not those of others, tended by extension to undercut the validity of the author's own moralism, apparently did not bother the satirist.

The affair of Suillius Rufus made clear the perils involved in directly attacking, or criticizing Seneca, let alone Nero. Thus if Persius, as I suggest, sought to make such a criticism by means of a Platonic travesty, he could not succeed by employing a technique of subversion otherwise than he did. To present Socrates indulging Alcibiades' desires (as Seneca indulged Nero's) was not possible. It would have grossly violated the entire tradition about the Athenian sage and, furthermore, make too transparent the authorial intent which, under the circumstances, meant courting danger. This last point also pertains to the implicit parallels in the satire's second half. Although in reality Seneca and Suillius kept

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[33] See Rudich (n. 3) 11 ff.

[34] *Quo facilius lubricam principis aetatem, si virtutem aspernatur, voluptatibus concessis retinerant.*

[35] See Rudich (n. 3) 61.

accusing each other of misconduct and even crime, like Persius' quarreling immoralists, no direct identification is overtly invited.

If this interpretation of its contents and purpose holds, satire four may be fairly accurately dated by AD 58, the year of Suillius' trial, or shortly thereafter.

Elsewhere I have observed that in comparison to parody, travesty possesses a sharper critical edge.[36] But without knowing all the details of the context in which the travesty is placed, its full impact on the audience is increasingly difficult to ascertain. It is a satire's ability to generate what I call a 'counter-rhetorical' reading[37] privileging what is topical and relevant to the immediate circumstances and experiences of both the author and his audience, that ultimately accounts for its success. Persius' high reputation among his contemporaries testifies that they were able to read into his work much of what is now necessarily lost to us.

From my interpretation of the fourth satire, however, at least one further inference can be made regarding the society he sought to reject: that was the society where, in his view, no moral reform could prove feasible, least of all, a moral reform of the ruler in the guise of political pedagogic. There only remained a few uncommon individuals who were capable of struggle for self-perfection, under the guidance of Stoic wisdom, and entirely withdrawn from public affairs.[38] This is how Persius seems to have envisaged – rightly or wrongly – his own life.

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Статья посвящена анализу четвертой сатиры Персия с точки зрения возможности отражения в ней реальных политических событий времени Нерона. Первая часть сатиры (ст. 1–22) представляет собой травестию тем, образов и мотивов (псевдо-)платоновского диалога "Алкивиад Первый", но если в греческом тексте предпринятая Сократом в

[36] Rudich (n. 10) 193.

[37] *Ibid.*, 9 f.

[38] This makes the subject of the fifth satire and this contrasts it with the fourth – perhaps, a deliberate arrangement either by the poet or by his teacher Annaeus Cornutus who edited his work for posthumous publication.

отношении Алкивиада эротико-политическая *пайдейя* заканчивается успехом, то у Персия она терпит неудачу. Отношения Сенеки и его воспитанника Нерона в период т. н. "золотого пятилетия" его правления (54–59 по Р. Х.) воспринимались, а отчасти и задумывались (что явствует из писаний самого философа – *De Vita Beata* 27, 5) как римская параллель к платоновской коллизии Сократ–Алкивиад. Сатиризацией этой последней поэт выразил неодобрение оппортунистической, с его точки зрения, педагогике Сенеки как "ложного Сократа" при молодом императоре. Вторая часть сатиры (ст. 23–52) посвящена интерпретации дельфийской заповеди "Познай самого себя" и должна быть увязана с обвинениями Сенеки делятором Суиллием Руфом в безнравственности, приведшими к суду над самим обвинителем (Tac. *Ann.* 13, 42 sq.). Поэт осмеивает псевдо-моралистов, яростно порицающих пороки других и при этом не способных осознать свои собственные. Сопоставление с процессом над Суиллием Руфом позволяет датировать сатиру 58 годом по Р. Х.