From Plume to Palate: A Feast for the Senses in Horace’s *Satires* Book 2

1. The “slender diet” (*victus tenuis*, S. 2.2.53, 70; see also *ervum tenue*, 2.6.117)

   A. Hor. S. 2.2.116-22 (speech of rustic sage, Ofellus)
   
   “*non ego* narrantem *iemere edi luce profesta quidquid praeter holus fumosae cum pede pernae. at mihi seu longum post tempus venerat hospes sive operum vacuo gratus conviva per imbrem vicinus, bene erat *non piscibus urbe petitis, sed pullo atque haedo; tum pensilis uva secundas et nux ornabat mensas cum duplice ficu.*’”

   He said: “On an ordinary day I do not rashly eat anything except *vegetables* with a foot of smoked ham. And whether a guest has come after a long time, or a welcome neighboring *dinner companion* has come to me, freed from work because of the rain, it is **not acceptable to eat fish ordered from the city**, but rather chicken and goat. Then hanging *grapes* and *nuts* with a split *fig* decorate the dessert course.”

   B. Hor. S. 2.6.63-4 (at Horace’s Sabine farm)
   
   *o quando faba* Pythagorae cognata simulque uncta satis pingui ponentur *holuscula lardo?*

   O when will my *beans*, relatives to Pythagoras, be served, along with my *little vegetables* sufficiently rubbed with rich lard?

2. Hor. S. 2.2.23-30


   Nevertheless, if a peacock were served, I would scarcely doubt your desire to **brush your palate** with this rather than a chicken. You have been corrupted by vanities since this rare bird has come at the price of gold and creates a spectacle with its colorful tail – as if this fact mattered at all. **Surely you don’t eat those very feathers that you praise?** When cooked, is its beauty still present? Although there is no difference in the flesh, you still prefer the peacock to the chicken? It is clear you have been deceived by their unequal appearance.

3. The senses at the satiric table

   A. Hor. S. 2.2.35 (sight)
   
   *ducit te species, video ...*

   I see it’s the *visual appeal* that draws you in ...
the highest pleasure is not in a pleasing smell, but in you yourself.

For he ate as much food as he could eat with pleasure; and he was so prepared for eating that he considered desire for food to be the best sauce.

Learn, my good friends, what virtue and how great a virtue it is to live within small means.

Rather here, unlunched, join me in investigating.

When suddenly a loud crash of the doors shook each mouse from his seat.

We fled him [Nasidienus], getting revenge by tasting nothing at all as though Canidia, worse than African serpents, had breathed upon the food.