

Besmeared: Horace's Development of Roman Identity and New Satire through His Use of Blindness

Within the very nature of satiric genre lies the development of Roman identity as seen through the eyes of the author and the audience. Quintilian states *satira quidem tota nostra est* (satire is completely ours) and thus defines satire as a distinctly Roman creation. I argue that Horace, with his reinterpretation of the genre with the background of the changing fabric of Roman society, alters the way in which post-Lucilian satire and its subject matter are perceived. It is through the major instances of blindness in Book 1 that he displays a new counter-Lucilian type of satire, a new understanding of morality, and a resurgence of the importance of friendship and politics. In each instance of blindness, Horace presents his own appearance as an authority of Roman life and establishes an understanding of the new idea of what it means to be Roman.

In this paper, I delve into the depths of Horace's imagery and usage of sight, both figuratively and literally. Several instances of blindness stand out as reflecting both Horace's poetic identity, as well as that of Roman identity: 1.1 Horace uses *lippus* to describe Crispinus and insult the past philosophy and poetry of Lucilius, which begins Horace's separation from that tradition in favor for the development of the new age of satire and of Rome. In 1.3, Horace focuses on the vices of Roman citizens and how people are often blind to their own faults, while focusing upon those of others (lines 25-27). In this, Barchiesi and Cucciarelli argue that Lucilius views himself as a kind of 'beneficial salt rub' in the satirists position, whereas, I argue, Horace presents himself, the satirist, as a friend or father figure, guiding his peers through the murky waters of Roman immorality (*The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*). In 1.5, one of the most popular scenes of blindness, Horace states of himself: *oculis ego nigra meis collyria lippus illinere*. Again, the image of blindness highlights a Roman value. Here Horace can be seen, as

Oliensis suggests, as an ideal friend who would rather blind himself than reveal the nature of his friends' political dealings (*Horace and the Rhetoric of Authority*). The depiction of vision, and lack thereof through blindness, highlights the identity through which Horace wishes satire to now be read, in accordance with the new age of Roman values: a new political system, a return to morality, and the necessity of *amicitia* in society.

By introducing the reader to a genre filled with blindness, I argue that Horace does so in order to reflect the continuously flowing idea of what it means to be Roman. Horace's development of a new identity both for Rome and for satire explains the reasons behind the instances in which Horace depicts himself or others as blind. In taking his foundation from Callimachus, Lucilius, and others, Horace makes satire something completely his own, and completely Roman. Horace pulls the thread of Roman-ness through the eye of the needle of blindness and in doing so, links himself, poetry, and Roman society together through one primary image of sight and the lack thereof.

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