

A Recipe For Disaster: Horace, *Satires* 2.4 and 2.8

Few genres in antiquity are as multicultural as satire, which, despite its reputation as authentically “Roman,” engages with domestic as well as foreign issues that pertain to slaves and freedmen, Romans and Greeks, men and women and politicians and poets. Horace’s *Satires* in particular scrutinize various aspects of life in Italy, although the influence of Epicurean doctrines in virtually every poem provides this diverse collection with a sense of unity. This philosophical tradition was known for its founder’s famous universal call—that is, addressed to all humans regardless of status, sex or age—to happiness, and Horace consistently incorporates his teachings into the *Satires*. From the pleasure calculus of Epicurus to his economic, ethical and social doctrines, Horace applies philosophical teachings to the complexities of Roman culture, which includes all of the intricacies of festive *convivia* and social gatherings. This is at the core of two poems in particular (*Satires* 2.4 and 2.8) that will be the focus of this essay.

In *Satires* 2.4, one *Catius* dictates to Horace a somewhat lavish dinner recipe that was recently shared with him by an unnamed “source” (11: *auctor*). Given the language he uses and a few intertextual clues, his advice has been read as parody of Epicureanism (Rudd 1966; Cucchiarelli 2001), which was criticized for its identification of “pleasure” (*voluptas*) as the standard of living. A few scholars, however, have viewed the culinary precepts *Catius* rehashes not as parody of authentic Epicureanism but rather as that of those who grossly misinterpret and thus misrepresent Epicurus’ teachings (Coffey 1976; Classen 1978; Plaza 2006; Yona 2018). Others have identified the *auctor* of this recipe as Horace himself (Gowers 1993; Ferriss-Hill 2014), or even as *Nasidienus* (O’Connor 1990; Berg 1995-1996; McNeill 2001), the ostentatious host of *Satires* 2.8. Interestingly, the connection to Epicureanism so clearly established in 2.4 is rarely carried into 2.8, in which the recipe in question is put into practice. The result is

disastrous, for Nasidienus' endless descriptions of the delicacies he dishes out makes for extremely banal conversation, ending with the dramatic fall of a curtain (54-78) and the sudden departure of his guests (80-95).

This paper will attempt to establish a stronger link between these two satires by concentrating on the role of Epicureanism in both. Catius' comical misinterpretation of Epicureanism in *Satires* 2.4 may be due to a failure to memorize teachings, which was essential for faithful followers of Epicurus, and it may also be linked to parody of the polemical climate of philosophical debate in Horace's day. *Satire* 2.8 portrays Nasidienus failing as host when he puts this recipe into practice. By making such misguided "teachings" the absolute center of the convivial gathering, he transforms what should be a pleasurable philosophical exchange among friends (cf. *Satires* 2.6.65-77, which is certainly meant to be contrasted with 2.8) into a one-sided lecture about something as mundane as food. To make things worse, underlying his descriptions of various dishes is a superstitious belief in the magical power of certain ingredients to charm people (Freudenburg, 1995 makes this observation but without mentioning Epicureanism), which is emphasized by Horace's final words regarding how Maecenas and the others escaped (93: *fugimus*, an Epicurean watchword) "things blasted with Canidia's breath" (94-95).

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