

Satirical designators for Romans. The Roman past and Roman names in Persius' Satire 1

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SATIRICAL DESIGNATORS FOR ROMANS.
THE ROMAN PAST AND ROMAN NAMES IN PERSIUS' *SATIRE* 1

Introduction.

Persius makes his first satire a manifesto against the literary trends of his time, intertwined with the morals of his contemporaries. Both his moral and literary criticism resonate with Stoic principles and they are articulated in a sequence of images evoked in a dialogue between Persius and an imaginary interlocutor. In a satire with an inextricable link to society, criticism is laid out through attacks to the contemporary Romans, with the difference that they are not once referred to as *Romani*. Instead, Persius refers to them four times with the names: *Polydamas et Troiades* (line 4), *Titos* (line 20), *Romulidae* (line 31), and *Romule* (line 87). In existing scholarship, his onomastic preferences have received attention by Tzounakas, who examines them as allusions to Persius' predecessor, Horace. Tzounakas' article is the first treatment of the matter and he also notes the absence of a work devoted to Persius' usage of proper names¹. The names examined here though constitute a different and unique onomastic practice that has not been discussed in its own right.

This article proposes an understanding of these four names as the means for an onomastic practice that Persius employs in order to facilitate the caricaturing of his targets. All these names derive from the Roman heroic past and they demonstrate some sort of relationship between the contemporary Romans and their roots. The association of Persius' contemporary society with the honoured past can be seen on two diametrically opposed levels². At first, this society is endowed with its respected traditional values; the Romans claim inheritance from the heroic past and the qualities attributed to it, mirrored in the honorific names and designators, such as the ones used by Persius. Yet a closer look shows that this only happens superficially and ostensibly: the Romans behave in the exactly opposite way, making the use of these names ironic and provoking satire in turn. Persius

* I am thankful to Spyridon Tzounakas for his support and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

¹ Tzounakas 2008c. Roller incorporates comments on names used by Persius and Juvenal. Although considered not on their own merits, the names yield good examples for the examination of "free speech" in Persius: Roller 2012, 287-92. See also Kenney's examples of names in the same volume (Kenney 2012).

² For a recent overview of critics' positions towards Persius' relationship with society and the connection with his readership see Bartsch 2015, 125-26 with bibliography. Anderson 1982 writes of Persius' "rejection of society", whereas Fredricksmeyer 1990, 800 suggests his "self-satirization".

exploits this contrast in the use of these names as designators for his contemporaries³. An analysis for their conspicuous and subsequent connotations, will reveal that the use of the specific names is actually a technique that enables Persius to found his satire on a more subtle theme, that of the contrast between appearance and truth.

In this article, a first onomastic approach examines the names at face value, their placement in a satirical context, and their possible derogatory characteristics. These new, *satiric* designators take up the role of the caricatures that bring about Persius' criticism, and although honorific in essence, they are crucial in emphasizing the moral decay of his contemporaries. The moral criticism becomes more extensive and attacks aspects of a literary decadence of the time, and hence its poetic taste and production. Finally, this article turns to the evaluation of this onomastic technique, thus addressing an overseen yet revealing aspect of Persius' poetics.

The onomastic choices: Names from the past as contemporary designators.

The names Persius uses to refer to the Romans are drawn from Rome's mythic, epic, and oft-recounted past. At first sight, these names stand for three aspects that members of the Roman elite would stress as indicators of their high social status, altogether pointing to a dignified ancestry: the Trojan mythic origins, the aristocratic old tribes and families of Rome, and Romulus as the founder of the city are the three sources from which the names derive. Persius however, reverses the illustrious connotations of these names by incorporating them in his invective. The result is that the names are found in contrast with the diminishing context of his satires. The irony that this technique evokes, supports the satirist's purposes and this is what this section will demonstrate.

Persius starts his first satire by declaring his indifference to the recognition or acceptance of his work by his contemporaries. In doing so, he refers to his targets with names that encapsulate the reasons for this dismissiveness (1.4-7): *ne mihi Polydamas et Troiades Labeonem | praetulerint?* ("...that Polydamas and the Trojan ladies might exalt Labeo above me?")⁴ The two figures are associated with timidity and consternation and carry allusions to the *Iliad*, in particular 6.441-3 and/or 22.99-107.⁵ The

³ A reasonable question is 'why Persius prefers these names instead of referring to Romans as *Romani*?' Booth 2006 has briefly proposed a mechanism for answering these questions and although she does not claim it to be "a single methodological model", it is applicable here. Booth argues that we can refer to cases like this as 'choice' or 'suppression'.

⁴ All the texts cited are from the latest editions of the *OCT*, unless otherwise indicated. All translations are my own.

⁵ The first scene (6.442-43) is from Hector's response to Andromache for not staying on

sage-like figure of Polydamas appears in the Homeric text with highly developed rhetorical skills and he is more sceptical and presents caveats more readily than the more impulsive Hector⁶. Yet Persius is not particularly concerned with Polydamas' rhetorical skills; the exploitation of the Homeric figure is, rather, based on his judgmental attitude (*Il.* 22.100): Πουλυδάμας μοι πρῶτος ἐλεγχείην ἀναθήσει ("Polydamas will be the first to place reproach upon me"). Polydamas is accompanied by Trojan women (*Troiaides*), with a name found only here, coined from a Greek (Homeric) name, and placed emphatically in juxtaposition with the Latin *Labeonem*⁷. Persius stresses the Trojan ancestry of the Romans but turns a blind eye to *pater Aeneas*, which is justified by the satirist's interest in underlining the allusions to the *Iliad*⁸. Themes deriving from the Trojan cycle were popular in that time, thus the two Homeric names introduce in the satire the theme of contemporary taste in literature. It is also possible to identify the literary preferences as being dictated by Nero, possibly implied here by Polydamas who appears as the leader of the crowd that both form the audience Persius scorns⁹. They appear as a judgemental mob, resembling a *chorus* with the *coryphaeus* of an Aristophanic comedy.

With the use of the accusative *Titos* (1.19-21) as the next reference to Romans, Persius points to the aristocracy gained through ancestry from the city's old families:

*tunc neque more probo videas nec voce serena
ingentis trepidare Titos, cum carmina lumbum*

the wall with her. The second (22.99-107) is from Hector's speech outside the walls of Troy. See in particular lines: 22.100 and 22.105-6. The public censure by *Polydamas* and *Troiaides* evokes Hector, see Harvey 1981, 14.

⁶ In particular, in *Il.* 12.61-79, 211-19; 13.726-47; 18.254-83. See Dentice di Accadia 2006. This image of Polydamas survives until later literature and is alluded to in the tenth book of Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* 10.9. The latter passage and his following *gnome* for a rational solution to the war elicit Polydamas's positive qualities, yet he is condemned for cowardice by Paris. See Maciver 2012, 87; 94 n. 40.

⁷ Freudenburg 2001, 155 notes on the passage that there are "no real Romans left, only Polydamases and Trojan Women. As in Lucilius book I, *Romanitas* is dead". See also Kenney 2012, 123.

⁸ Cf. Juvenal 1.100: *Troiugenae*. Juvenal uses the name referring to the Roman elite, who considered themselves descendants of Aeneas' companions. Although the context is different, the similar use of the same idea by the satirists points to an element of Roman identity claimed by the aristocrats, but one that is fading since contemporary Romans do not support it through their acts.

⁹ Whether Nero is implicitly under attack in the satire is open to dispute. For the different approaches, see Herrmann 1963; Witke 1984; Anderson 1982, 182; Sullivan 1978, 167. At any rate, it is a common truth that "even Persius, a satirist who manages so well to insulate himself from the outside world, cannot be read without letting Nero in" (Gowers 1994, 132).

intrans et tremulo scalpuntur ubi intima versu.

Then, neither in seemly manner nor with serene voice,
you can see huge Tituses thrill as poems enter
their loins and vibrant verses tickle their inmost parts.

By using *Titos*, Persius makes it possible to exploit its polysemy, thus creating subsequent meanings. In particular, the name is used in Latin: a) as a typical Roman *praenomen*, b) as a reference to the old tribe of *Tities*, and c) metaphorically as an allusion to the male genitals, as in vulgar Latin¹⁰. While the choice of the name here exemplifies Persius' careful composition, it also underscores the importance he gives to the use of names¹¹. As a typical Roman *praenomen*, the name is indiscriminately inclusive of all Romans, which is in accordance with Midas' myth which governs the core of this satire (1.8; 121): *nam Romae quis non... auriculas asini quis non habet?* ("for in Rome who does... not have ass's ears?"). This, in conjunction with its reference to the old tribe, makes *Titos* act as a reference to aristocracy as claimed through ancestry from old Roman families and the two connotations together emphasize the presupposed *romanitas* of society and connect it with the Roman past. Not surprisingly, it is the metaphorical meaning of the male genitals that will support the satirical function of the name, but this will be discussed in the next section.

The connection with the Roman past yields also epic, mythic, and heroic qualities. All these are projected through the founder of the city, Romulus. In lines 28-29 the interlocutor tries to beguile Persius into pandering to public recognition, which will assure his book's future survival as a textbook¹². This, at least, is the goal that the majority of his contemporary authors aspired to, simply a public and wide recognition, stated again in 41-2: *an erit qui velle recuset / os populi meruisse* (is there anyone who would deny the

¹⁰ See Villeneuve 1918, 25-26 and Dessen 1996, 36-37 for the name's use in vulgar Latin. For *Titus* belonging to colloquial Latin, see Adams 1982, 44; 214. From Adams' discussion one can also suggest that the name's polysemy enables a social comment. See also Freudenburg 2001, 167-68; Lee & Barr 1987, 70. This is a reference to the Roman aristocracy, which is also apparent in the use of *trossulus* (1.82). See also Delignon 2011, 6-7; Dessen 1996, 28; Adams 1982, 32. See also Miller 2010, 250 for the ironic tone of the verse. It is also possible that it recalls the Greek *τίτις*, see O'Sullivan 2012, 356-7. If so, then Graecism is also implied here. The use of *Titus* leaves sexual innuendos clear to the contemporary audience. Hence, its choice is justified by the ancient scholar: *Schol. Pers. 1.20 ingentes autem Titos dicit generaliter Romanos senatore a Tito tatio sabinorum rege, aut certe a membri virilis magnitudine dicti Titi*. See also Lucil. 93-94 M. For the sexual connotations see Tzounakas 2021a, 524-6.

¹¹ See Tzounakas 2005, 571 n. 94 with an overall review of what has been commented on the subject, among which see Merwin & Anderson 1961, 35-45; Witke 1962, 155 n. 87; Morford 1984, 92; 107.

¹² Sosin 1999, 287-88.

wish to have earned a place on everybody's lips?). In his response to the interlocutor's preference for the public recognition, Persius refers to the Romans as *Romulidae* (1.28-31)¹³.

‘at pulchrum est digito monstrari et dicier “hic est.”
ten cirratorum centum dictata fuisse
pro nihilo pendes?’ Ecce inter pocula quaerunt
Romulidae saturi quid dia poemata narrent.

‘But it's fine to be pointed at by a finger and hear *That's him!*

That you are the dictation for a hundred curly-haired boys,

do you count as nothing?’ Look! Over their cups

the sons of Romulus –stuffed full– are asking now what divine poems to talk about.

Romulidae is a patronymic derived from the name of the founder of Rome with the epic suffix *-ida*, *-ae*, which originates from the corresponding Homeric suffix *-ίδης*. Latin derivatives with this suffix were often used for tribes or ethnic groups with a common (mythical) ancestor, as it is also happening here¹⁴. The figure of Romulus goes far back to the foundation of the city, and consequently the appellation *Romulidae* becomes a reference to the heroic Roman past and implies Roman nobility¹⁵.

Romulidae however is not commonly used in Latin literature and apart from Persius it is only found in Vergil (*Aen.* 8.638) and Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 4.683). In the two epics, *Romulidae* refers to the early history of the city, the struggle for survival and domination, and the glory that followed, thus consolidating the name's epic character¹⁶. Its use as a designator in the epic refers to the people who were actively involved in the episodes that

¹³ For a different interpretation of *cirrati*, slaves trained to become *cantores*, see Booth 1985. Hooley 1997, 42-43 for *Romulidae saturi* as a substitution for Horace's *Celsi Ramnes* (*A.P.* 342).

¹⁴ For the Homeric (perhaps Aeolic formation) patronymics in *-ίδης* see Keurentjes 1997; Aitchison 1964, 137-38. For the use of the particular formations for patronymics in Latin verse one can consult Swanson's Index: Swanson 1967, 360.

¹⁵ For examples of his legacy as the founder and the father of Rome, and as a model of autocracy, see Roller 2001, 248; 254. Romans are referred to with a name indicative of their heritage; in addition to being the citizens of the glorious city, they are also the descendants of her heroic founder. References to *Romulus* can also evoke the meanings of *virtus*, *ρόμη* due to the etymology of the name, see Paschalis 1997, 238; 295.

¹⁶ In the episode from Lucretius (4.682-3), nature assists the growing power of Rome by protecting her from the attack of the Gauls. The patriotic tale of 387 B.C.E. (Livy 5.47.1-4) comes from the glorious past of the city, when her power was being established in the area. The episode from Vergil's *Aen.* 8.637-38, drawn from the very early history of Rome, is a prophetic one at the time when Aeneas' shield is forged. The shield depicts tales from Roman history which are substantial for Rome's evolution. The epic character of *Romulidae* is based on its etymology. See Wehrle 1992, 87; Lee & Barr 1987, 72. Bartsch 1998, 330 highlights the depiction of the Roman struggle as a major element in the description of Aeneas' shield.

ensured the prosperity of Rome, and who established Roman power in a strictly manly way; thus *Romulidae* encapsulates the values upon which Roman power is based. The grandeur attached to the name from its epic character enhances its degradation in satire, which is in accordance with the character of satire as “anti-epic”¹⁷.

The name of Rome’s founder is used again metonymically for the judges in the court where a certain Pedius speaks, and applies also to the Romans more generally (1. 85-87)¹⁸:

*‘fur es’ ait Pedio. Pedius quid? crimina rasis
librat in antithetis, doctas posuisse figuras
laudatur: ‘bellum hoc.’ hoc bellum? an, Romule, ceves?*

‘You are a thief!’ says someone to Pedius. How does he respond? The charges he balances in smooth antitheses, and for composing clever tropes he is praised: This is lovely! *This* is lovely? Are you swinging your ass Romulus?

The Horatian context of the reference is indicated by the use of the name *Pedius* (*Serm.* 1.10.28)¹⁹. Horace’s *Pedius* is a symbol of *latinitas* in style, without the inclusion of Graecisms. Thus, by alluding to Horace Persius stresses another facet of the Roman past, which is the desire for pure *latinitas*, a prerequisite for both Roman society and Latin literature²⁰. It is by focusing on the function of a particular name that we get a clear view of how Persius gives prominence to the Roman past as the main angle of his critique. As Tzounakas puts it “while Horace’s *Pedius* is associated with the Roman past (*patriaеque patrisque Latini, patriis...foris*), Persius’ *Pedius* is alienated from the Roman tradition and its morality”²¹. The alienation of his character that Tzounakas notices, affects the way Romans respond to *Pedius* in a poet-reader relationship. This way, the focus moves to *Romule*. *Romulus*’s acceptance of *Pedius*’ alienation is provocative and results in his satirical mockery. The audience in a court resembles in taste and behaviour the audiences of poetic recitations. The satirist takes his accusations from the sphere of literary criticism to the judgement in court just to prove that the deterioration in taste, the mass-behaviour, and the appeal to the ornamen-

¹⁷ See most recently Ferris-Hill 2015, 25 n. 92 with relevant bibliography.

¹⁸ It is less likely that the name refers to *Pedius*, for which see Anderson 1982, 189. Wehrle 1992, 23 sees the possibility that *Romulus* refers to the court officials, but he further recognises that its use as a metonymy for the Romans intensifies the city’s corruption by taking it to her founder (p. 113). Harvey 1981, 42 notes that “whether Persius means the judge of the court or simply any member of the nobility who favours *Pedius*’s type of rhetoric is undiscoverable and unimportant”.

¹⁹ For the identity of this *Pedius*, see Gowers 2012, 320.

²⁰ See Tzounakas 2008c, 128-130.

²¹ Tzounakas 2008c, 129.

tation of the message rather than to its content can be observed widely in society. The parallelism is a variant of the moral decay and the parallel decline in literature.

The employment of the Names in Persius' Criticism.

Persius' moral criticism is mainly structured through accusations of effeminacy that stem from the apparent false displays of the ancestral virile character and Roman masculinity as part of a nostalgic *ethos*. The moral principles of the past are praised in the form of *rusticitas*, and they revolve around the appropriate virility and solidity of the Romans linked to the illustrious Roman past in contrast to the contemporary moral decay²². The moral facets of this critique are brought to mind through the names used for contemporary Romans that stress the contrast between the Roman values that Persius' contemporaries put on display and their true morals. The names therefore serve their satirical purpose: as a mechanism, they lead to the caricature of the targets of the satire. In this section this technique will be discussed as an attack to the moral decay, which however expands to a literary level and includes the poetic taste of the time.

Persius' use of *Troiades* (1.4) points directly to the effeminacy of his contemporaries²³. One first observes the feminine gender of the designator, chosen between Τρῳάς and Τρῳάδας (*Il.* 22.105) so that the masculinity of the Romans descendants is negated²⁴. Ransom's article on notions of emasculation in the *Iliad* encourages us to identify Persius' accusation as a direct allusion to the *Il.* 2.235: ὃ πέπονες, κάκ' ἐλέγχε', Ἀχαιῖδες, οὐκέτ' Ἀχαιοί ("Soft weaklings, despicable shame, you women, not men of Achaea anymore")²⁵. Such an allusion supports the contrast with the Roman past and the effeminacy points to the deprivation of otherwise necessary virility. As Bramble notes: "the Romans no longer deserve to be called men"²⁶. The message hidden here is that contemporary Romans only superficially assume the heroic traits of their ancestors, and the use of the feminine gender clarifies this²⁷. As a designator, the name facilitates the introduction of

²² See Ferris-Hill 2012, 381-82, after Bramble 1974, 16-17. See also Tzounakas 2006.

²³ See Braund 1996, 16; Reckford 1962, 501. The emasculation of his contemporaries is a basic element of their identity and the accusation is constructed through their taste for literature as well as on their morals. For emasculation see Miller 2005, 199; *id.* 1998, 282; Wehrle 1992, 74; Morgan 2004, 12 for an account of the contrast between masculine and effeminate literary style as expressed in the use of elision.

²⁴ Ransom 2011, 37.

²⁵ Ransom 2011, 36. See also *Il.* 7.96 and Verg. *Aen.* 9.617.

²⁶ Bramble 1974, 69; Connors 2005, 138.

²⁷ See Miller 2005, 199: "the shift to the feminine after the heroic reference is deflating"; Bramble 1974, 69; Reckford 1962, 501.

Persius' contemporaries as decayed remains of a glorious past – effeminate cowards instead of brave founders.

Next come the *Titi* and their reaction to a bad performance, a rather pompous recitation of poetry relying more heavily on the reciter's presentation than its content (1.19-21)²⁸. The barren poet however succeeds in evoking excitement from his audience²⁹. *Titos* is expected to refer to members of the virile aristocracy, being reminiscent of the glorious Roman past. However, both the context and the subsequent connotation of the name for penis undermine the alleged glory and endow it with a sense of fluidity and lewdness, pointing to effeminacy and divergence from the high values of Roman satire³⁰. Romans have violated the social code of masculinity³¹. This becomes most clear in the structure of the reaction: notably, *Titos* occupies the central place of the second verse in a three-line description (1.19-21)³². In these lines, the words chosen to signify the audience and express their behaviour indicate sexual arousal, an idea that has already been announced with *patranti* in line 18: *patranti fractus oculo*. The first half of the verse, *ingentis trepidare Titos*, conjures up an image of inappropriate public behaviour, whilst *ingentis* and *trepidare* enhance the allusion to the male genitals³³. The object *lumbum* completes the verse, enhancing the motion of *trepidare*³⁴. The verb encompasses the highly erotic image and it displays the effect of the *tremulo... versu*, provided by the deceptively innocent *carmina*, which are the main subject of the scene.

The moral accusations culminate in the reference to the founder of Rome in a scene where the audience accepts an unworthy message with enthusiasm (1.85-87), similar to the previous one with *Titos*. Persius' Romulus is imbued with a sense of effeminacy through the use of *cevere* (movement of the pathic male), which encapsulates the action of the verse and the reaction to Pedius' refined speech³⁵. The use of the verb signposts a pathic role and

²⁸ Reckford 2009, 40-41.

²⁹ Dessen 1996, 37: "poetry which, arising from a barren source (the homosexual poet), arouses the productive sexual urges of its audience, the *ingentis Titos*".

³⁰ See Werhle 1992, 16 for the allusion to luxury/lewdness; Gavrielatos 2021; Miller 1998, 267 for the notion of fluidity. Both these qualities are condemned by Roman satire, which aims at a virile and genuine character, see Miller 1998, 282.

³¹ Skinner 2005, 247-8.

³² See Reckford 2009, 40-41; Plaza 2006, 93; Cucchiarelli 2006, 169; Freudenburg 2001, 167; Miller 1998, 267; Wehrle 1992, 16; 19; Bramble 1974, 78-79.

³³ See Powell 1992, 154 for *patrare*. See also the comment on *ingentis Titi* in Bramble 1974, 78. For the relationship between effeminacy and one's inability to control passions, see Williams 2010, 156-70.

³⁴ See Adams 1982, 48 for *lumbum*.

³⁵ For the meaning and use of *cevere* see Adams 1982, 136-37. See also the comments on

recalls the motion of *trepidare* in the earlier case of *Titos* (20)³⁶. The sexual motion corresponding to a passive partner creates an oxymoron with Romulus who, as an honoured hero of the Roman past, stands as an embodiment of traditional masculinity. This enhances the inappropriateness of the act and results in a caricature of the designator. Again, the choice of name succeeds in levelling the accusation and stressing the juxtaposition between one's appearance (Roman virility) and actions (pathic homosexuality).

The fundamental idea of Persius' first satire is that the moral values of a society go hand in hand with its taste in literature³⁷. Consequently, the mechanisms used for attacking the morals extend to the literary production of the time. As one of these mechanisms, the names applied to contemporary Romans denote the heroic past, but at another level they facilitate Persius' literary critique³⁸. In accordance with the paradigm of the moral criticism, his attack is grounded in the juxtaposition of the literary production and the Roman past. At this level, Persius disapproves of the Romans' receptiveness to contemporary literature, which encompasses all the blemishes – both moral and poetic – of his time. While effeminacy is the accusation that predominates the moral criticism, the aptitude for Trojan themes in literature, the audience's approval based on the senses, and the Graecisms are the three symptoms of the poetic decadence.

With the reference to Polydamas and Troiades (1.2-5) the satirist anticipates that his work will not benefit from enthusiastic reception from his contemporaries, who prefer Attius Labeo's translation of the *Iliad*. The attack is shaped in light of the effects of 'Trojanification'³⁹. Romans have

the use of the verb as well as its interpretation in the particular context in Powell 1992, 158; Wehrle 1992, 23; 113; Anderson 1982, 189; Bramble 1974, 126; Reckford 1962, 481. Note that the verb does not necessarily point to an obscene act, but an act of sexual invitation. See Butrica 2006, 35; Kamen & Levin-Richardson 2015:454-5. Williams 2010, 178 and 2015 *passim* offers an analysis of the receptive role in sexual actions between men.

³⁶ See Bramble 1974, 79 for the relation between the two verbs.

³⁷ See Seneca *Ep.* 114: *Non potest alius esse ingenio, alius animo color. si ille sanus est, si compositus, gravis, temperans, ingenium quoque siccum ac sobrium est* ("A man's style cannot have one quality and his soul another. If the soul be healthy, placid, serious, and restrained, the style also is unembellished and sober"). For the echoes of this in Persius, see Ferris-Hill 2012; Plaza 2006, 43; Powell 1992, 165 with further bibliography; Dessen 1996, 24. For Seneca see Setaioli 2000, esp. 166-172; Dominic 1997.

³⁸ A different example of metapoetic names in Heslin 2011. The metapoetic effect of the names in Persius though is not based on them being *redende Namen*, but on the exact opposite: they conceal the true character with their respectable characteristics.

³⁹ "Trojanification" has been suggested by Freudenburg 2001, 154-58: "(Rome's) passion for all things Iliadic that converts Roman enthusiasts into... sniping and anti-heroic critics drawn straight from the pages of Homer's *Iliad*" (154-5). Henceforth, I will use it for the preference for Trojan themes in the literature of the time, but I will expand it to the term's

gained ‘Trojanified’ ears and consequently they have developed the habit of over-estimating imitative works with Trojan themes compared with original compositions with Roman content⁴⁰. Apart from recalling the mythic past of Rome, *Troiades* also implies a Roman crowd endowed with the characteristics of a mass, analogous to mass-production in literature and support by way of popularity. Thus, the audience’s ovation indicates a lack of objectivity and logic⁴¹. In a similar vein, the leading figure of *Polydamas* can possibly designate Nero, as the one who dictates literary taste. Consequently, the audience’s ineptitude at literary criticism impedes the authors’ original creativity. This is better understood with the cross-reference to Labeo’s work in lines 50-51 (*quid non intus habet? non hic est Ilias Atti | ebria veratro?*, “What it doesn’t include? Isn’t there Attius’ *Iliad*, I drunk with hellebore?”), which points to the influence of drinking involved in the production of the work, perhaps also with sexual connotations⁴².

The use of the names here with their subsequent meanings help illustrate the relationship between the audience and the author and they epitomize what will be expanded in the rest of the satire: that audience and authors are trapped in a vicious circle where the former supports literature of low quality, and the latter produces it in order to please. From a moral as well as a literary perspective, both are accused of superficially respecting the glorious Roman past. Although they claim to be its successors, they replace its progress and evolution with slavish imitation⁴³. On the other hand, Persius’ unwillingness to succumb to the taste of the *hoi polloi* is what draws the line that distinguishes him (with his scarce, yet selected readers) from the targets of the satire: the contemporary authors and the supportive masses, designated by *Polydamas* and *Troiades*⁴⁴. Labeo’s translation of the *Iliad* was allegedly a bad piece of work, but it is not necessarily a personal attack⁴⁵.

implications for the Roman mythic past. Persius is concerned more about this Trojanification than about Labeo himself. See also Zietsman 2004, 73; Mayer 1982, 312.

⁴⁰ See the references to *Remus* and *Cincinnatus* (1.73): *unde Remus sulcoque terens dentalia*, *Quinti*. See also Dessen 1996, 28.

⁴¹ Powell 1992, 156; Bramble 1974, 108-9. See 1.121: *auriculas asini quis non habet?* The audience Persius finds repellent obeys to the tastes of *turbida Roma* (1.5), see Wehrle 1992, 14-15.

⁴² See Gavrielatos 2021, 291-2; Tzounakas 2014, 191-5.

⁴³ See Tzounakas 2006, 123; Freudenburg 2001, 181. This is not to say that Persius aspires to a “return to the verities of the past” (Miller 2010, 246), but rather to a development and evolution of literature with the Roman past as the starting point.

⁴⁴ See the “drawing lines” model for the satiric invective by Roller (2012) 299-302 and 306-7, after Bogel 2011.

⁴⁵ Presumably there was more than one poet who would provoke Persius’ judgement: Freudenburg 2001, 154; Nisbet 1963, 42. Besides, Persius does not attack individuals by

Labeo is a typical example, perhaps the most representative one, of the category of authors under attack who enjoy the praise of the corrupted and philistine Romans⁴⁶. He embodies the lack of creativity, the limited appreciation for the uniqueness of an original text, and the compromised taste of the masses⁴⁷.

From the Roman designators we examine here, *Polydamas* and *Troiades* are not the only ones used for denoting the Roman audience while Persius depicts the decadent poetic landscape. Their applause is described most vividly with the effeminate reaction of the *Titos* (20) to a recitation of bad poetry⁴⁸. The descendants of the Roman past are accused of forsaking their principles in favour of a literature that titillates the senses. This comes in contrast to the rationality Persius wishes his audience had (1.126): *inde vaporata lector mihi ferveat aure*. The focus on *Titos* in the structure of the line sheds light on the description of the audience that excitingly receives this poetry and as a corollary it indicates the literature Persius despises⁴⁹. *Romulidae* (1.31) is the subject of a similar scene, where the Romans demonstrate further misjudgement, which culminates in the use of *saturi*⁵⁰. The adjective enhances the irony of the epic grandiosity attached to the audience by the designator⁵¹. The Romans of the scene are sated metaphorically by the Greek stuff (*dia poemata*) and literally through over-eating⁵². Pleasure from food or poetry, placement in a *cena* or a poetic

name: see Tzounakas 2008c, 124-5.

⁴⁶ More recently Bartsch 2015, 33; see also Bardon 1975, 33; Korfmacher 1933, 282-4. For the use of proper names and their function as irrelevant to specific individuals see Coffey 1976, 110.

⁴⁷ Dessen 1996, 24 summarises “the kind of the verse derided by Persius” in the following characteristics: imitation, rich descriptions, soft euphonious rhythms, and flattery of Nero, based on the evidence of court poetry this period. Moreover, Persius’ opposition is one against fashion, justified by his inspiration from Old Comedy (1.123-5). For the latter’s response to fashion see Wright 2012, 83-86. See also Bartsch 2015, 60.

⁴⁸ For the performance see Reckford 2009, 40-41. For the effeminate overtones see Tzounakas 2021b, 449-50; Delignon 2011, 7.

⁴⁹ See Hooley 1997, 39. The scene can also stand as an example of Ferriss-Hill’s description (2012, 384): “What impression are we left with, then, of the sort of literature Persius despises? It is oversized and overweight, shapeless and lumpy, and can be ingested only by those who lack taste”.

⁵⁰ See Bramble 1974, 101-2. There is no need to dispute the negative content of the adjective here against a reference to the genre of satire. See Coffey 1976, 11-18 for the origin of the genre’s name.

⁵¹ The progression from the metaphorically physical magnitude with *Titi* to the ironically epic grandiosity of the same audience with *Romulidae* is noted by Powell 1992, 154. See also the most recent Bartsch 2015, 38-39.

⁵² The culinary connotations of the adjective are most generally accepted today: see

recitation, engagement with luxury or literature; each pair has interchangeable parts, as Bramble notes⁵³. Correspondingly, the reaction to poetry is analogous to the reaction to food, and the appreciation of literature is based on the audience's impulses, free from the logical principles of Stoic teachings. Thus, the scene becomes the display of an overall deterioration of both moral and literary judgement⁵⁴. The audience's approval of the despised poetry is reflected again in Romulus's appreciation of Pedius' rhetorical devices. His *rasis antithetis* responds to the meretricious style instead of the content. These devices (*doctas figuras*) become persuasive simply because they appeal to the senses and thereby deviate the focus from the content (*crimina librat*).

The receptive character towards literature of the Roman audience is the over-arching theme in Persius' literary criticism. Another aspect of this criticism is the Graecisms of the poetic landscape. Squilante Saccone has agreed with Pennacini about the effective satirical effect of the antithetical *Romulidae saturi – dia poemata* in 1.31.⁵⁵ The Greek origin of *poemata* is an indication of the Graecism in the contemporary literary taste found in juxtaposition with the name. In a similar vein, the use of *Romulus* in 87 functions as a bilingual/bicultural word-play with the *rasis antithetis* (85-86): the Roman personality most representative of the inherited principles and values falls for a Graecism⁵⁶. In both cases, the name-designator serves as an immediate reference to pure *Romanitas* and the heroic past of Rome since her foundation. Similarly, the Greek *Troiades* is emphatically juxtaposed with the name of Labeo (1.4), the translator of the greatest Greek epic. Overall, the names underscore that the relationship between poetic writing and its audience suggests abandonment of Roman themes in favour of Greek topics and prototypes⁵⁷.

The moral accusations suggested through the names provide an additional

Gowers 1993, 110; Bartsch 2015, 61. The negative aspects are based on the sense of *over-eating*, in congruence with the implications of the genre's name: see Plaza 2006, 101-2. The beginning of *Sat.* 5 offers a similar parallelism (1-6). The metaphor can be expanded to the cause of *saturi* being heavy food, standing for 'heavy' poetry that is stuffed with ornaments and Graecisms, the latter in order to imitate Greek works.

⁵³ Bramble 1974, 101-3. See also Reckford 2009, 43; Wehrle 1992, 87; Dessen 1996, 23. There is no need to discard the allusion to the effeminacy of his targets as the consequence of luxury.

⁵⁴ See Coffey 1976, 114.

⁵⁵ Squilante Saccone 1976, 101-2; Pennacini 1968, 421-25.

⁵⁶ "Refined" could equally mean with ornamentations of Greek rhetoric, thus imitation from Greek applies here again. See Korfmacher 1933, 279. At the same time, the modifier *rasis* implies effeminacy; see Tzounakas 2008c, 129, with Rudd 1986, 180.

⁵⁷ See also Bartsch 2015, 159-60; Tzounakas 2008b for the Graecisms in Persius.

nuance to this relationship. Charges of effeminacy imply a passive nature to the relationship between the accused Romans and the messages they receive, especially in 87: *Romule, ceves?* Romulus is addressed in a similar manner by Catullus (29.5.9: *cinaede Romule, haec videbis et feres?*)⁵⁸. The verb *feres* used by Catullus supports the reading of there being a receptive audience. Seeing Persius' line as alluding to Catullus is tempting, especially in view of the parallel interrogative tone, the use of *cinaede* and *ceves* in the same context, and the similar message (that is the placid reaction to the civic decadence). As a corollary, and since *Romulus* is used by Catullus as a metonymy for Caesar, Persius' Romulus could also imply Nero. However, it is equally possible that the name is chosen by both authors as a colloquial pejorative way to address Romans with a clear satiric effect.

In Persius, the passive homosexuality of the audience reflects their passive reception of Greek influences. To take our thought a bit further, the pathic tone of the innuendos regarding Romulus's homosexuality (*Romule, ceves?*) imbue this crowd with the inability to react, a passive acceptance to whatever is imposed to them⁵⁹. This is in contrast to the active and vigorous Roman ancestors. This comes in juxtaposition to the mass-like behaviour of the *Troiades*. Imitation of Greek themes and Graecized style in literature, as well as preference for the latter, indicate slavish behaviour from two perspectives: firstly, such an attitude is opposed to any freedom of originality in literature, and secondly, the literary taste of the Romans is dictated by Nero's philhellenism⁶⁰. At the same time, this slavish imitation shows disrespect toward *Romanitas*, which serves as a poetological reference to the indisputable virile Roman character of the genre of satire⁶¹. Both on a moral and a literary level, the Romans have obtained names reminiscent of their heroic past, which contrasts with their passive acceptance of its mistreatment.

⁵⁸ Bramble 1974, 126 n. 1 doubts a direct influence from Catullus, yet a proverbial quality of the name should not be dismissed.

⁵⁹ For the 'passive receiver' see Miller 2010, 237-38. See the passive acceptance as penetration with degradation of masculinity in Walters 1997, 29-31.

⁶⁰ See again n. 1, above. This slavish behaviour is already mentioned by Herrmann 1963, 237: "... la vraie liberté n'est pas celle des affranchis, mais consiste à dompter les vices et les passions". The opposition to imitation of Greek literature is a common theme in Roman satire and a major theme in Lucilius. The accusation of slavish imitation of Greek themes against genuine Roman inspiration has been noted by the early scholars on Persius, see Cartault 1921 and Korfmacher 1933, 278; 282-84. See also Tzounakas 2008a, 104; Freudenburg 2001, 158; Wehrle 1992, 14.

⁶¹ See Tzounakas 2005, 560 n. 9. That is why Persius has to reject the "liquid" and "sensual" aspects of the contemporary poetry: Anderson 1982, 173.

Conclusions: Roman caricatures and Mythic heroes with the same names.

The four extracts that have been examined so far exemplify perhaps the most prominent theme in Persius' criticism, that is the contrast between the surface of things and the truth, between the interior and the exterior⁶². In addition to being a common Stoic idea this contrast becomes in Persius a poetic device that leads to caricaturing the contemporary Romans⁶³. The names become the mechanism, the means for this technique: references to Romans are made with four names reminiscent of their public image that has been shaped by the glorious Roman past. However, this public façade of the aristocracy masks their moral decay. The discussion so far has shown how Persius' use of these names reveals this contrast and thus how he is employing this particular category of onomastics to write satire. Persius offers a hint of this: *hic tamen infodiam* (120). He hides the truth in his book, he entrusts it in his work, covered by the images, the metaphors, and as we saw, the names as well.

A first way to achieve this contrast is through the juxtaposition of the names with their context. Bartsch has highlighted the significance of juxtapositions in Persius and her analysis provides a framework for the understanding of the contrast that is achieved through the names, too⁶⁴. The names are often placed in contrast to other elements of the same image and whilst the names denote the Roman past, the context depicts an image of decay. The most typical example of this juxtaposition is that of *Romule* (1.85). The use of *ceves* creates the oxymoron: the virile heroic figure from the Roman past is the subject of extreme effeminacy. It is also possible that at a subsequent level this contrast is enhanced by the wordplay between the masculinity evoked by *ῥώμη* (the etymological root of *Romulus*) and the effeminate character of the verb⁶⁵. This double juxtaposition results in a caricature of the heroic past, strongly linked to contemporary reality. Although claiming the qualities attributed to this past, Romans act in an effeminate way. In a similar vein, the virile aristocracy implied with *Titos*, is juxtaposed with their sexual arousal (1.19-21). Additionally, their size (*ingentes*) is juxtaposed with their trembling (*trepidare*). Once again, the gravity and solemnity of their aristocratic position and ancestry is juxtaposed with an immoral motion.

The juxtaposition between a dignified designator (name) and a derogating context and implied meaning, evokes a second layer of interpretation, based

⁶² The theme will be also the main topic of satire 4.

⁶³ The caricatures recall Persius's own claims from Old Comedy. For the caricature in Aristophanes see Ruffell 2002; Komornicka 1992.

⁶⁴ Most importantly in Bartsch 2015, 160-62.

⁶⁵ See n. 16, above.

on the common Stoic contrast between the interior (truth) that is concealed by the exterior (surface) of things that has found its place in Persius' satires, too. This is better seen in the multiple meanings of *Romulidae*, let alone of *Titi*, and subsequently leads to a discussion of 'what's in a name?'⁶⁶. The use of the proper name *Titos* has particular connotations, the most explicit one being the direct link to the heroic Roman past. The name however, is only a superficial indicator of aristocracy and does not befit the true qualities of its bearers. The true character is concealed behind the name. One needs to delve into it in order to conceive the idea, and the reader needs to peer past the surface of the names Persius uses in order to achieve a profound understanding of his critique. *Intrant* and *intima* (line 21) also point towards the necessity to search in depth; it is not their aristocratic appearance that reacts to the recited literature, but the Romans' impulses and passions. Similarly, Persius accentuates the importance of introspection in order to reach one's true character, under the facade of socially shaped identity⁶⁷. The names he chooses for the Romans then derive from social conventions and constitute the *surface* of Persius' contemporaries: their true characters lay behind the ostensible morality, virility, etc. By exposing the truth through the designators, Persius employs an onomastic technique that corresponds to the idea of the hidden truth and calls upon readers to search deep within themselves, employing critical thinking, free of misleading ideas, in order to achieve pure knowledge of truth.

To recapitulate: moral decay and the parallel decline in literature are concealed under the faded glory of a misinterpreted past. The misconstructions of the past, both Greek and Roman, lead merely to their ostensible endorsement, in public appearance and literary choices, whereas their true character and the encapsulated values are abandoned. The contrast is apparent in the difference between the appearance of the literature of Persius' day and its actual character. Although authors claim the glory of the honoured literature of the past, this is only visible in the selection of themes, and the grandiose and epic style, whereas the quality of the content is low, showing signs of decadence and being a slavish imitation⁶⁸. The only aspiration is to appeal to a massive audience and claim immortality through tested poems. At the moral level, effeminacy is concealed under the honourable Roman toga, which accentuates the Romans' hypocrisy and becomes a main theme in the satire. The same idea is apparent in Juvenal's second satire, where effeminate Romans are the main targets; especially those who hide their sexual

⁶⁶ See also the association of the two with Romulus and the comments in Tzounakas 2008c, 130 n. 24.

⁶⁷ See Bartsch 2015, 123-26.

⁶⁸ An idea Persius has expressed clearly in his Prologue.

desires and homosexual relationships behind their public mask⁶⁹.

In addition, the accusation of effeminacy entails a more pragmatic approach: it functions as a means to caricature Roman stereotypes and consequently the society that aspires to them. The stereotypes are indicated by the names, which are rhetorically deployed in Persius' imagery and manifest themselves in the caricatured Romans. He takes up the concept of 'a better past', attaches it to the names, and satirises a society that clings to the idea, but does not act accordingly. To conclude, Persius' work does not focus on the smoothness of presentation, but on the content; it requires a cleansed ear, a medium of reception that is amenable to critical thinking. In comparison to Hector in the *Iliad*, who was much more concerned about public censure, Persius is well aware of his potential audience; he anticipates their disapproval (*ne mihi...praetulerint?* 4-5), but nevertheless adheres to what is true and real, both in society and in literature. The cleansed ear of the target readership (*inde vaporata lector mihi ferveat aure* 126) also has the function of 'cleaning' the truth from what obscures it. The targeted readers will be capable of critical thinking and will uncover the truth, seeing what lies beneath the surface of things. Eventually, they will be able to read the truth that is hidden under the imagery of the satires.

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⁶⁹ Hypocrisy is the main cause of Juvenal's attack in his satire. Claiming moral integrity, but behaving with dishonourably, and claiming descent from the virile Romans of the glorious times, but indulging in effeminacy are common themes in satire. Juvenal's annoyance at this set of moral contradictions is highlighted in 2.19-21. The reference to the Roman elite is even clearer in Juv. 8.181-82. The claims of the Roman elite to Trojan descent are a favourite topic in Juvenal's mockery, again in 11.95. See also n. 8 above. Gunderson 2003, 153-55 highlights masculinity as an integral part of the genuine – and for that reason aspired to – Roman identity.

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ABSTRACT:

Persius refers to Romans with names drawn from the Roman past, namely *Polydamas et Troiades*, *Titos*, *Romulidae*, and *Romule*. The names are chosen due to their multi-layered semantics and allusions that result into irony and generate paradoxes that make up the satire. This paper aims to highlight the employment of these designators as a case study in literary onomastics in Roman satire. It comments on the function of the names in their context with a focus on the treatment of the Roman past through them; then it analyses the emerging patterns as additional aspects of Persius' style and critique.

KEYWORDS:

Persius' satires, Romans, aristocracy, effeminacy, onomastics irony.

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