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## Eating With The Eyes: The Visual Appearance of Food in Horace's *cena Nasidieni* (Satire II.8) and Juvenal's *cena Virronis* (Satire 5)

*That visual imagery and food are salient components of Roman verse satire is evident, but the interaction between food and the eyes is rather elusive. The factors which determine that a food-item be included in a satiric meal are, oddly enough, superfluous to the proper reason for cooking and eating: colour, shape, size, portion – not the basic criteria by which one normally assesses a food – dominate most of the dishes in Horace's *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal's *cena Virronis*, whereas more relevant properties, such as smell and flavour, seem to have been relegated to a secondary position. This article examines the visual dynamics of the food described in Horace's *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal's *cena Virronis*, aiming to: i) explain how and why the eyes usurp the place of the nose and/or the mouth; ii) argue that the eyes' prominent role accords with the satirists' self-appointed mission to observe the world around them.*

**Keywords:** Roman verse satire, food, *cena*, eyes, Horace, Juvenal, *cena Nasidieni*, *cena Virronis*

### Introduction

'Food is in the guts of Roman satire', as Gowers aptly remarks,<sup>1</sup> not only as a theme in its own right,<sup>2</sup> evidently playing upon the functions of the grotesque

<sup>1</sup> GOWERS (1993: 109).

<sup>2</sup> Besides, the very name *satura* is culinary by origin. The fourth-century AD grammarian Diomedes offers four possible explanations of the derivation and the meaning of the word *satura*, two of which connect satire with food: *satura autem dicta sive a Satyris, quod similiter in hoc carmine ridiculae res pudendaeque dicuntur, quae velut a Satyris proferuntur et fiunt: sive satura a lance quae referta variis multisque primitiis in sacro apud priscos dis inferebatur et a copia ac saturitate rei satura vocabatur; ...sive a quodam genere farciminis, quod multis rebus refertum*

body which has a major place in a literary genre as self-consciously 'low' as satire,<sup>3</sup> but also as a symbol laden with connotations, thus constituting an appropriate vehicle for the satirist's commentary,<sup>4</sup> whether social-moral (the satirist derides the epicures, and denounces the extravagant preparation and excessive consumption of food, as he sees this situation through the lens of his own moderate and plain diet –itself bearing a metaphorical charge) or stylistic-aesthetic (culinary vocabulary applies both to food and to literature –the satirist's self-referential/metapoetic, intertextual, literary-critical references in particular). Recent scholarship has considerably advanced our understanding of Roman verse satire's approach to food,<sup>5</sup> but one aspect that has not been adequately studied is the heavy emphasis on the visual features of many foodstuffs which are found in the works of the satirists. It is my contention that, oddly enough, the factors which determine that a food-item be included in a satiric meal are, for the most part, superfluous to the proper reason for cooking and eating: colour, gloss, shape, size, number of pieces, portion –not the basic criteria by which one normally assesses a food or food ingredient–dominate most of the dishes in Horace's *cena Nasidieni* (Satire 2, 8) and Juvenal's *cena Virronis* (Satire 5), whereas more relevant properties, such as smell and flavour, seem to have been relegated to a secondary position.

The importance of visual imagery and food as two of the salient components of satire has long been recognised. But beyond this, more precise deductions about the interaction between food and the eyes do not come easily. This article takes a closer look at the (neglected) visual dynamics of

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*saturam dicit Varro vocitatum. ...alii autem dictam putant a lege satura, quae uno rogatu multa simul comprehendat, quod scilicet et satura carmine multa simul poemata comprehenduntur.* Diomedes, Grammatici Latini (Keil) 1.485. See the full discussion of COFFEY (1989: 11–18). Also, HOOLEY (2007: 73; *passim*).

<sup>3</sup>On the bodily grotesque in Roman satire, see MILLER (2009) with further references.

<sup>4</sup>KEARNS (2019).

<sup>5</sup>The pioneering study of GOWERS (1993) on the representations of food in Roman literature is the natural foundation for further work in the area. Also, the matter is treated at large by HUDSON (1989); BARTSCH (2015); HOOLEY (2007: 72ff. and *passim*); GOWERS (2018); FERRIS-HILL (2022: 48; 68ff.; *passim*), to mention only a few scholars. Moreover, there is a very contemporary drive in Classics that seeks to re-think the role of the senses in the Greco-Roman World. On sight, SQUIRE (2016) offers the best discussions.

the food described in Horace's *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal's *cena Virronis*,<sup>6</sup> aiming to: i) explain how, in these two dinners, the eyes usurp the place of the nose and/or the mouth, and, concomitantly, why the food creates a visual appeal and stimulation instead of an olfactory and/or a gustatory one; ii) argue that the prominent role given to the eyes is in accordance, *inter alia*, with the satirists' self-appointed mission to observe the world around them. What is about Horace's *cena Nasidieni*? A lot, it seems. Red honey-apples, green rockets, white pepper, the liver of a white goose parade about in an overly luxurious and ostentatious show. Similarly eye-centred, Juvenal's *cena Virronis* is a lavish *versus* miserly food selection of: a snowy-white bread, a lobster with long breast, eggs cut in half, a fish spattered with grey blotches, and a fattened fowl.<sup>7</sup>

I agree with Barkan that both Horace's *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal's *cena Virronis* deserve to be read for the food.<sup>8</sup> But before we attempt to determine the purport of food in the two satiric dinners here under examination, we are confronted with the preliminary question: what is a literary *cena*? Roughly put, very differently from the *symposium*, which is concerned primarily or exclusively with the conversation of the guests, the *cena* is concerned with what is served at a dinner.<sup>9</sup> The *cena* has as its focus of attention food, not conversation, while even the stifled conversation in the continuous flow of dishes is saturated with gastronomy, not philosophy.<sup>10</sup> It is this form that concerns us here. Needless to say, Horace in the *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal in the *cena Virronis* are carrying on the tradition of Lucilius, who was the first to establish the *cena* in Latin satire.<sup>11</sup> For with all the fertility of innovation

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<sup>6</sup> SHERO (1923: 134) is right in saying that 'In the brief corpus of Persius' writings we find no satire or elaborated passage carrying on the tradition of the Lucilian-Horatian *cena*'.

<sup>7</sup> This is not the place to get into a long discussion about all the other viewable possessions displayed during these dinner-parties, such as: furniture, appurtenances, fine tableware and tablecloths, well-dressed servants, serving practices, wall paintings and decoration items, etc. For our present purposes, we will focus mostly on a network of food-related issues.

<sup>8</sup> As BARKAN (2021) reads them.

<sup>9</sup> On this, see SHERO (1923).

<sup>10</sup> GOWERS (1993: 136).

<sup>11</sup> That the *cena* does occur in Lucilian satire, despite its fragmentary state of preservation, is undeniable. PLAZA (2006: 108, n.110).

which the two successors display, their debt to Lucilius is obvious –further evaluation and study of either Horace’s or Juvenal’s imitation of Lucilius in their dinner-satires, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

### *cena Nasidieni* (Horace, Satire 2, 8)

Satire 2, 8 is an account of the pretentious dinner-party given by the conceited upstart Nasidienus Rufus;<sup>12</sup> a dinner-party characterised by lavish and unwonted pomp and ostentation.<sup>13</sup> The dramatic fiction of Satire 2, 8 has Horace *qua* character missing the *cena Nasidieni* and hearing about it only on the following day from Fundanius, who was one of the guests. Horace, who was not present himself,<sup>14</sup> asks Fundanius about the food served, not the conversation (*Da, si grave non est, / quae prima iratum ventrem pacaverit esca* ‘Tell me, if you don’t mind, what was the first dish to appease an angry appetite?’,<sup>15</sup> Satire 2, 8, 4–5). In response to Horace’s interested prodding, Fundanius reports the courses.

Satire 2, 8 is a dinner gone wrong; but not for the obvious reason, that is the final fiasco: the falling wall-hanging and fleeing guests. The meal proper at Nasidienus’ party is much easier to the eyes than to the stomach. Let us

<sup>12</sup> Among all the scholarly attempts to interpret Nasidienus’ role in the poem, particularly relevant for our argument is GOWERS (1993: 169) and FREUDENBURG’S (2001: 121) remark that there must be a point to the name Nasidienus. It looks like a well-chosen pun on *nasus* (NASidienus ‘Mr. Nose’), implying that Nasidienus’ pseudo-artistic, *haute-cuisine*, creations would be perceptible through the nose.

<sup>13</sup> The majority of scholars to treat Satire II.8 dismiss it as a weak ending to both the second Book and the *Satires* as a whole, or, even as a slight entertainment. See, for example, FRAENKEL (1957: 137; 144); RUDD (1966: 213–223); COFFEY (1976: 89); CASTON (1997) with further references. For other aspects of Satire II.8 (its Lucilian model, Nasidienus’ role, its structural and thematic design, etc.) see indicatively: O’CONNOR (1990: 31ff.); GOWERS (1993: 166ff.); MUECKE (1997: 227ff.); FREUDENBURG (2021: 289–296); CLASSEN (1978); BERG (1995); OLIENSIS (1997); MARCHESI (2005); LOWE (2010); SHARLAND (2011).

<sup>14</sup> On Horace’s absence from Nasidienus’ dinner, see BAKER (1988: 226–227); FREUDENBURG (1995: 217); MUECKE (1997: 228); CASTON (1997: 241ff.). See also GOWERS (1993: 166–167), on Fundanius as an *alter ego* of Horace; KEANE (2006: 119–120). KEANE (2015: 64) finds a similarity between Horace’s absence from Nasidienus’ dinner and Juvenal’s non-involvement in Virro’s dinner.

<sup>15</sup> For Horace, I follow the Loeb text and translation of H. R. FAIRCLOUGH (1929, reprinted 2005).

come to a detailed analysis of some of the foodstuffs provided in the meal. Nomentanus –to whom was delegated by the host, Nasidienus, the significant duty of drawing the guests' attention to the finer points of the fare<sup>16</sup> informs the guests that the apples served owe their rich red colour to the fact they were picked beneath the light of a waning moon (*post hoc me docuit melimela rubere minorem / ad lunam delecta* 'After this he informed me that the honey-apples were red because picked in the light of a waning moon', 2, 8, 31–32).<sup>17</sup> Clearly the general body of Horatian commentators cannot be wrong in maintaining that 'melimela',<sup>18</sup> 'honey-apples' are so called because of their extraordinary sweetness.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the red honey-apples served at Nasidienus' party, however, there is not the slightest reference to their taste. We do learn that the apples are red because they were picked when the moon was less than full,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup>BAKER (1988: 221). cf. *Sat.* 1, 1, 102; *Sat.* 1, 8, 11; *Sat.* 2, 1, 22; *Sat.* 2, 3, 175; *Sat.* 2, 3, 224. RUDD (1966: 142–143); FREUDENBURG (2021: 305 *ad* 23): 'already in the first satire of book one, the name is a byword for reckless expenditure and self-indulgence'; FREUDENBURG (2021: 305 *ad* 25): because Nasidienus is anxious to show Nomentanus off to Maecenas as his own personal dining guru, and an enthusiastic veteran of his *recherché* foods and fine wines, he positions him *summus in imo*, where he himself would otherwise be expected to recline. The expertise possessed by Nomentanus is that of comic cooks and parasites.

<sup>17</sup>MUECKE (1997: 234 *ad loc.*), rightly observes that apples belong to the dessert, a later stage in the dinner. They could be mentioned without being on the table at this point.

<sup>18</sup>DUNBABIN (1917: 139): 'Hehn, *Kulturpflanzen* 198-9, cited by Friedländer on Martial I.43.4, 13.24, thinks *melimela* are quinces made into jam. His reasons apparently are that the Spanish *membrillo* and the Portuguese *marmelo*, which are derived from *melimelum*, mean a quince, and that he misunderstands Mart. 13.24 *si tibi Cecropio saturata Cydonia melle | ponentur, dicas 'haec melimela placent'*, where the point of the epigram would be lost if *melimela* were quinces. But *delecta* here shows that *melimela* cannot be quince-jam, while *rubere* shows that they cannot be quinces; for quinces are yellow and jam is not 'picked.' Also Pliny, *N.H.* 15, mentions them, not in §§ 37-8 under *cotonea*, but under *reliqua mala* in § 51. Gow says *melimela* 'appear to be a kind of apple produced by grafting on a quince.' But this would not explain why the quince came to be called *marmelo* in Portuguese and *membrillo* in Spanish; and Pliny, who mentions the grafting of several kinds of fruit, 15, §§ 38, 41, 42, 43, 49, 52, 57, says nothing of the grafting of *melimela*. The simplest explanation is that *melimela* are some sweet kind of apple (cf. Plin. *N.H.* 15, § 51 'mustea a celeritate mitescendi [sc. traxere nomen], quae nunc melimela dicuntur a sapore mellis'), and that in Spain and Portugal the name was transferred to the quince, cf. Irish Peach, Jerusalem Artichoke, Cape Gooseberry. The reason for the transference was doubtless that an early variety of quince was also called *musteum* (Plin. *N.H.* 15, § 38).'

<sup>19</sup>MUECKE (1997: 234 *ad loc.*) and FREUDENBURG (2021: 306 *ad loc.*).

<sup>20</sup>MUECKE (1997: 234 *ad loc.*): 'this is taken variously as the new moon and the waning moon. Behind this precept is a large body of superstition about the moon's effect on vegetation, often connected with the idea that growth of plants was nourished by dew, thought to be

but the question is whether or not the weather conditions and the phases of the moon had contributed in any efficient way to either the taste or the smell of the apples. ‘What difference that makes, you would learn better from himself’,<sup>21</sup> says Fundanius (*quid hoc intersit ab ipso / audieris melius*,<sup>22</sup> 2, 8, 32–33). What is more, the description of the apples here has little of the gustatory effect of the preceding lines. Preceded by the catalogue of lines 27–30 (*cenamus avis, conchylia, piscis, / longe dissimilem noto celantia sucum; / ut vel continuo patuit, cum passeris atque / ingustata mihi porrexerat ilia rhombi* ‘[we] eat fowl, oysters, and fish, which had a flavour far different from any we knew, as, for instance, was made clear at once, after he had handed me the livers of a plaice and a turbot, a dish I had never tasted before’) which includes foodstuffs that are eaten and have a flavour far different from any the guests knew, the presentation of the honey-apples serves to show by contrast that they are only characterised by a perceptible quality, i.e. their red colour, lacking every other quality that could have made them especially savoury.<sup>23</sup>

Seemingly inconsequential is the remark about the white pepper (*pipere albo*, 2, 8, 49) and the green rockets (*erucas viridis*, 2, 8, 51),<sup>24</sup> which appear among the ingredients of the sauce accompanying the moray eel-dish. The pepper has reverse colour, while the green colour of the rockets could be affected after boiling. And it may perhaps be of interest to note that the green rockets are juxtaposed with another ingredient, the elecampane, also to be

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moisture sent down by the moon... It was therefore considered important to time agricultural operations according to moist or dry phases of the moon...’. On the allusions to witchcraft in the poem, see FREUDENBURG (1995: 209–210).

<sup>21</sup> FREUDENBURG (2021: 306 *ad loc.*), argues that Fundanius is unable to recollect the lecturer’s abstruse line of reasoning.

<sup>22</sup> PALMER (1885: 376 *ad loc.*), glosses the ‘hoc’ as ‘their being gathered so’.

<sup>23</sup> AS GOWERS (1993: 4–5), has observed, an apple on a table is graspable and obvious. The fact that we can reach out and touch it, smell and taste it, makes it seem like the essence of uncomplicated matter. The pieces of honey-apples on Nasidienus’ table, however, can only be detected by the guests’ sense of sight, their colour is seen.

<sup>24</sup> FREUDENBURG (2021: 309–310 *ad loc.*): ‘an especially bitter and biting ancestor of modern rocket/arugula. It was a reputed aphrodisiac: “this vegetable is obviously heating, so that it is not easy to eat on its own without mixing some lettuce leaves with it. But it has also been believed to generate semen, and to stimulate the sexual drive” (Galen *On Foodstuffs* 639, trans. Powell 2003); cf. *Mor.* 84, Col. 10.1.372, Mart. 3.75.3, *Priap.* 46.7–8. The leaves and seeds of rocket appear in several “Apician” recipes, including one sauce recipe, [Apicius] *De re coquinaria* 9.10.’

boiled in the sauce, one, however, that is characterised by its bitter taste (*inulas ... amaras*, 2, 8, 51), whereas the rockets are described as just green. The fact that *garum* fish sauce was used in Roman cooking as a condiment and added an extra taste to food is hardly open to doubt.<sup>25</sup> But, one is compelled to ask: if all the ingredients of the sauce were processed, boiled, fermented, and blent into one mass, what need would there have been for Nasidienus to point out the colours of those ingredients when the colour, first, could not have been discernible in the sauce, and second, would have little to do with the taste and the smell of the end product? Even if we suppose that the readership of Horace was already familiar with the taste and the smell of those ingredients, and that any reference to them would have been superfluous in that case, the colour still seems to be brought in as an instrumental factor for the inclusion of the two ingredients in the sauce.

Even more suggestive than the colour of the pepper and that of the rockets is the size of the moray eel served with shrimps swimming all around it. In line 42, the word ‘murena’ is positioned between ‘swimming shrimps’ (*squillas ... natantis*) to suggest the visual layout of the dish itself.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the fact that the moray eel is “outstretched” (*porrecta*) on a platter alludes to its impressive length.<sup>27</sup> The dish consists of a moray eel caught pregnant to ensure tenderness; after spawning, its flesh would have been inferior.<sup>28</sup> The result is that, although the moray eel certainly calls for an elaborate gastronomic description, the emphasis on its size, a quality alien to both taste and smell, is very problematic.

The moray eel-dish is created solely to be aesthetically pleasing; it has not been chosen for either its flavour or smell. After all, it is destined to remain untasted. For midway through the meal, a tapestry (i.e. a hanging used to decorate the dining space) suspended over the dining-room col-

<sup>25</sup> For detailed discussion of the use of *garum* in Horace’s *Satires*, see GRAINGER (2021: 62–64; 87; 107–108; *passim*).

<sup>26</sup> GOWERS (1993: 173, n.224), well comments that the word-order suggests the arrangement on the plate.

<sup>27</sup> FREUDENBURG (2021: 308 *ad loc.*).

<sup>28</sup> GRAINGER (2021: 178).

lapsed, bringing clouds of thick dust down onto the moray eel-dish, which Nasidienus had so carefully served up to his guests with a detailed commentary.

Surprisingly enough, the sequence of Nasidienus' menu does not follow a proper order of courses; after the appetizer of boar comes the magnificent moray eel-and-shrimps showpiece, and the trencher with mutilated limbs is the last dish to arrive. The serving-tray is immense in order to hold all of the delicacies described in lines 86–89, a choice selection of animal-joints: the dismembered limbs of a crane, the liver of a white goose fed on rich figs, the torn-off shoulders of hares, blackbirds served with breasts burned off,<sup>29</sup> and pigeons without their rumps. No animal heaped onto this very huge platter is served whole; each is described by Fundanius as if it had undergone some carefully devised dismemberment or torture. This is partly a mockery of gastronomic fussiness, but it also has other shades of meaning; among them, Gowers' reading of the dish as a tragic *sparagmos* is of special importance.<sup>30</sup> From the appearance standpoint, Nasidienus serves the scattered limbs in the most impressive manner possible; but the dish turns out to be both eye-turning and stomach-turning. In the end, the guests' appetite is taken away by the sight of this very strange dish. It may be Nasidienus' commentary that causes the guests' disgust, but we have reasons to believe that the food on the platter could have been irritating as well. How to explain the attention centred on the colour of the goose, whose liver is also contained in the dish (*iecur anseris albae*, 2, 8, 88) is a problem apart, which calls for further analysis, and since the matter is of basic importance to our view of the poem we had better examine the evidence. We are to imagine Nasidienus pointing out the goose's colour as of gastronomic significance. Muecke comments: 'the [white] colour of goose defines it as the best do-

<sup>29</sup> RUDD (1966: 219), argues that the blackbirds were only crisped, for if they were burnt, the *suavis res* of the very next line (92) would make no sense; MUECKE (1997: 238 *ad loc.*), holds a similar view: *pectore adusto* must mean 'crisped' not 'spoilt', to avoid a contradiction with 'delicious things'; GOWERS (1993: 176–177): '*pectore adusto* should mean 'with breasts burned off' rather than 'with burnt or crisped breasts', as usually suggested.'; FREUDENBURG (2021: 316 *ad 90*), argues that the word may imply that the breasts have been blackened and nicely crisped.

<sup>30</sup> GOWERS (1993: 176–178) and FREUDENBURG (2021: 316 *ad 90*).



mesticated kind.’<sup>31</sup> This would for a start explain the curious emphasis on an optic characteristic. We are told specifically that the colour of the goose is white, but what we are not told is whether its meat is tender, or what its meat tastes like. Moreover, from the same line we learn that the goose (and not its liver) was fattened on rich figs,<sup>32</sup> a detail which again highlights a visual quality, namely, the size of the whole goose itself, although only its liver is contained in the dish.

Our attention centres now on lines 25–26, where ‘seeing’ and ‘showing’ are definitely the pivotal elements around which this passage –and, I suggest, the whole satire– hinges:

Nomentanus ad hoc, qui, si quid forte lateret,  
indice monstraret digito:

Nomentanus was there to see that if anything perchance escaped our notice, he might point it out with his forefinger;

Nomentanus was showing the finer subtleties of the foods which were on display while the guests were seeing them. The verb *vidimus* in line 91 adds to this impression. Palmer glosses *vidimus* as ‘we looked on while they were served, did not touch them’.<sup>33</sup> The mood of the whole piece is summed up in the phrase *nihil omnino gustaremus* (line 94): the guests left in rush without tasting the latter part of the meal.<sup>34</sup> After all that visual attention, Nasidienus’ meal turns out to be nothing more than a spectacle,<sup>35</sup> attended by guests–observers; Nasidienus has eyes, not palates to appease.

<sup>31</sup> MUECKE (1997: 238 *ad loc.*): ‘geese force-fed on figs to produce *paté de foie gras*, a luxury highly prized by the Romans’.

<sup>32</sup> FREUDENBURG (2021: 315 *ad loc.*), argues that *pastum* is better suited to the goose than to its liver.

<sup>33</sup> PALMER (1885: 379 *ad loc.*).

<sup>34</sup> It is usually assumed that the guests left in a rush, but some critics argue that we should not suppose that they left rudely while the meal was still in progress but that they stayed to see but not to taste the rest of the meal. See MUECKE (1997: 239 *ad* 93–95).

<sup>35</sup> There are, of course, references –albeit less frequent– to the taste of food in the *cena Nasidieni*, e.g.: *acria* (line 7), *suavius* (line 89), *suavis* (line 92). On these terms, see GOWERS (1993: *passim*).

### *cena Virronis* (Juvenal, Satire 5)

Juvenal's Satire 5 takes us to an iniquitous dinner-party.<sup>36</sup> Here we have a description of two contrasting, unequal, meals, one luxurious and one de-meaning. The central theme of the poem, i.e. the total breakdown of the patron-client relationship –a theme prominent in the whole of Juvenal's first book– is localised specifically in the particular items of food served. Except for Trebius the client, the rest of the guests are not mentioned by name and they take very little part in the action. We learn that Trebius is summoned to take the lowest place on the third and lowest couch (*tertia ne vacuo cessaret culcita lecto* 'so the third cushion on some empty couch won't be vacant', 5, 17),<sup>37</sup> and that he (and apparently others, *vos* in line 28 and *amicis* in 146) is distinguished from the *libertorum cohors* of line 28 and the *reliqui Virrones* of line 149. There is no conversation: host and guest never speak to each other, beyond the two-word invitation in line 18 (*una simus*). Trebius the client dines apart from Virro the patron, although he is dining with him. Not even their menus, taken in the same room, have anything in common.<sup>38</sup> Juvenal

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<sup>36</sup> MORFORD (1977: 229–230): 'In composing the fifth satire Juvenal was combining two streams of satirical tradition. The *cena* derives from Lucilius and Horace, while the importance of food as a literary subject is shown by the didactic *Hedyphagetica* of Ennius and the *Peri Edesmaton* of Varro. This tradition gives the poem its context and gastronomic detail. Although the *cenae* of Lucilius and Horace deal to some extent with the relationship of host and guest, it is from the other tradition that Juvenal draws more inspiration. ... This tradition is concerned with the position of the *amicus*, at its lowest as shown by the comic *scurra* or parasite, and in its commonest setting by the relationship of patron and client. Horace had frequently dealt with the theme, and *Epistles* 1.17 and 18 are closer to Juvenal's subject matter. It is Flavian literature, however, reflecting the social customs of the time, that links the *cena* most explicitly to the breakdown of the social order and the humiliation of Roman citizens. Pliny's letter (2.6) and many of Martial's poems are evidence for the customs attacked by Juvenal. Juvenal, however, created in his fifth satire an original work by combining the two satiric traditions and treating them with his own weapon of *indignatio*, more penetrating than the *lascivia* of Martial and the irony of Horace.'

<sup>37</sup> BRAUND (1996: 279–280 *ad loc.*); MORFORD (1977: 231), points out that the fact that Trebius has the lowest place at dinner (line 17) allows us to infer who are the superior guests (line 28). MAYOR (1966: 246 *ad loc.*): between the guests were placed pillows (*culcitae*) on which they rested their left elbows.

<sup>38</sup> MORFORD (1977: 220–221).

skilfully develops the sumptuous meal of Virro and the humiliating dishes set before Trebius in parallel,<sup>39</sup> to stress the contraposition all the more.

In his selection of details, Juvenal illustrates the dominant role that sight plays even in a food-centred dinner.<sup>40</sup> It is in the size and the colour of the different foodstuffs served that the hollowness of the relationship between Trebius and Virro is most clearly seen. Let us consider some of the 'visual dishes'. The bread handed to Trebius is stale and mouldy, too hard to be cut, that has with difficulty been broken into rough lumps;<sup>41</sup> so, Trebius chews in vain,<sup>42</sup> the bread resists every attempt at biting (*panem / vix fractum, solidae iam mucida frusta farinae, / quae genuinum agitent*,<sup>43</sup> *non admittentia morsum* 'bread that is hardly breakable, hunks of solid dough that are already mouldy, to keep your molars busy without letting you bite',<sup>44</sup> 5, 67–69). The kind enjoyed by Virro is soft and snowy white,<sup>45</sup> kneaded from the finest type of wheaten wheat (*sed tener et niveus mollique siligine fictus / servatur domino* 'But for the master is reserved soft and snowy-white bread kneaded from fine flour', 5, 70–71). What is more, respect for the bread-baskets, from which the client can take his bread, must be tactfully maintained.<sup>46</sup> But in order to use the proper basket, the client ought to know the colour of his own bread, i.e. black (*panisque tui novisse colorem* 'and don't forget the colour of your own bread', 5, 75). Therefore, the descriptions of the breads are rich not only in texture but also in colour information. The whiteness of Virro's bread contrasts with the dark colour of the bread proffered to Trebius. And

<sup>39</sup> ANDERSON (1982: 248–249) argues that Juvenal shows less concern with the objective entities of the contrasting menus than with a purpose of provoking an emotional response towards each item on the list. Therefore, Juvenal's rhetorical handling of the food destroys the impression of a mere menu.

<sup>40</sup> To my knowledge, the only attempt to read Satire 5 in the context of colours was made by HOPMAN (2003).

<sup>41</sup> MAYOR (1966: 256 *ad* 68) and COURTNEY (2013: 205 *ad* 68).

<sup>42</sup> cf. *pressoque diu stridere molari, Sat. 5, 160*.

<sup>43</sup> cf. Persius' portrayal of Lucilius (*genuinum fregit*, 1, 115) indicating the latter's satiric ferocity.

<sup>44</sup> For Juvenal, I follow the Loeb text and translation of S. M. BRAUND (2004).

<sup>45</sup> BRAUND (1996: 288–289 *ad loc.*): 'The patron's bread is described in terms of sexual attractiveness (*tener, niveus, mollis*), as if it were a beautiful slave-boy; it is the object of almost religious awe (*reuerentia*).'

<sup>46</sup> BRAUND (1996: 289).

while we do not learn why Trebius' bread is black, namely, if a certain ingredient or the baking process are some of the factors responsible for the colour, what we can say with relative certainty is that colour characteristics are involved here to highlight the fact that Trebius' bread was hardly edible; it could mainly be recognisable by its colour, and not by its taste.

The courses are served up in succession. The starters are announced by the empathic verb of seeing 'Aspice' in line 80,<sup>47</sup> which functions as a heading followed by an explicit explanation of the visual composition of the two different dishes of seafood brought to the diners at this stage. Virro' starter is a huge lobster, garnished with choice asparagus (*Aspice quam longo distinguat pectore lancem / quae fertur domino squilla, et quibus undique saepta / asparagis, qua despiciat convivium cauda* 'Look at the lobster that's brought to the master: look how its long breast makes the dish distinctive, how it's walled on all sides by fine asparagus, how with its tail it looks down upon the company',<sup>48</sup> 5, 80–82), whereas Trebius' is a crayfish hemmed in by an egg cut in half, crouched on a tiny platter (*sed tibi dimidio constrictus cammarus ovo / ponitur exigua feralis cena patella* 'But you are served with a crayfish hemmed in by an egg cut in half, a funereal supper on a tiny plate', 5, 84–85). Four aspects deserve a closer examination here: the length of the lobster's body, the portion of the egg, the colour of the greens, and the size of the plate set before Trebius. The presentation of the lobster dish is undoubtedly visual, to begin with. The long breast of the lobster alone is enough evidence to support a reasonable inference that a lobster of that size needs to be put in a capacious plate –not to mention the asparagus with which it is fenced round–,<sup>49</sup> but the plate offered to Trebius, by contrast, is tiny suggesting that its content is minuscule as well. Trebius' crayfish is served with half an egg, something that

<sup>47</sup> PLAZA (2006: 109): 'The passage begins with an imperative, "look"', and though the appeal is formally directed at Trebius, the reader is in effect urged to gaze up at the haughty dish'.

<sup>48</sup> There is an additional visual hint here. COURTNEY (2013: 206 *ad loc.*): 'It seems to look down scornfully on the clients from its elevation; they are despised by the very fish as well as the servants.' Also, PLAZA (2006: 110).

<sup>49</sup> BRAUND (1996: 290 *ad 80–81*): 'with what asparagus it is walled in on all sides, cf. *constrictus* 84. *saepta* figures the lobster as a king or prisoner surrounded by a bodyguard; the asparagus was perhaps presented erect like spears.'

again diminishes the size and significance of this dish. Moreover, Trebius' salad is broccoli; and indeed, colourless (*pallidus ... caulis*, 5, 87). So, it seems that Trebius' greens are not green at all.

Next, Virro is served with a lamprey, the biggest to come forth from Sicily's straits (*Virroni muraena datur, quae maxima venit / gurgite de Siculo* 'Virro is served with a lamprey, the biggest that comes from the Sicilian whirlpool', 5, 99–100). Waiting for Trebius is an eel, the long thin water-snake's cousin, or a Tiber bass covered with grey blotches (*vos anguilla manet longae cognata colubrae / aut glaucis sparsus maculis Tiberinus* 'What's waiting for you is an eel, cousin of the long snake, or a Tiber fish spattered with grey blotches', 5, 103–104).<sup>50</sup> Size and colour are again the most prominent visual features of the seafood served at this stage of the dinner. The *muraena* was a delicacy, particularly that from Sicily. Here is described only in association with its size. The alternative is river-fish spattered with grey blotches. The fish's blotches (*maculis*) and the sewage and sewer through which it swims introduce unsavoury associations.<sup>51</sup> What, however, makes the river-fish distinctive here is its coloured blotches.

If any lines can be selected as setting the keynote of the satire they would be lines 114–124:

Anseris ante ipsum magni iecur, anseribus par  
 altilis, et flavi dignus ferro Meleagri  
 spumat aper. post hunc tradentur tubera, si ver  
 tunc erit et facient optata tonitrua cenas  
 maiores. 'tibi habe frumentum' Alledius inquit,  
 'o Libye, disiunge boves, dum tubera mittas.'  
 structorem interea, ne qua indignatio desit,  
 saltantem spectes et chironomunta volanti  
 cultello, donec peragat dictata magistri

<sup>50</sup> On the geographic differentiation between exotic and local foodstuffs, see esp. UMURHAN (2018: 85–88).

<sup>51</sup> BRAUND (1996: 293 *ad* 104–106).

omnia; nec minimo sane discrimine refert  
quo gestu lepores et quo gallina secetur.

Before Himself is placed the liver of a huge goose, a fattened fowl the size of a goose and a frothing boar, worthy of blond Meleager's weapon. His next course will be truffles, if it's then spring and the longed-for thunder makes the menu longer. 'Libya,' says Alledius, 'keep your corn to yourself, unyoke your oxen, provided you send us truffles.' Meanwhile, to complete your humiliation, you'll watch a carver gyrating and gesticulating with flourishes of his knife, while he performs in full his professor's instructions. Of course, it's a matter of vital importance to carve the hare or chicken with the right gesture.

Maybe the most visually powerful and significant part of the two menus is found in the description of Virro's three meat dishes to Trebius' none. In front of Virro is the liver of a huge goose (*foie gras*), a fattened fowl as big as a goose, and a boar –a dish which otherwise ought to be shared–, while next on his menu are truffle mushrooms (provided it is spring and the longed-for thunder makes the menu longer, by adding yet another dish to the menu).<sup>52</sup> After repeatedly juxtaposing the luxurious food served to Virro with the scant fare served to Trebius in visual terms, Juvenal describes the centre-piece of the *cena*, i.e. the meat course, in the most visual manner possible. And so here we have another size-focused description, to contrast the host's hyper-abundance with the guest's mere scraps. At this stage in the dinner, however, there are no equivalent dishes for Trebius, something that quickly emerges as the central issue of the passage. As my comments have previously suggested, the food's visual features stand out so prominently from the frame of all other features. It comes as no surprise, then, that 'spectes' in line 121 seems to be the dominant impression of the description, not only of the carver slicing a hare and a hen, but also, I contend, of all the

<sup>52</sup> BRAUND (1996: 295–296 *ad* 116–18): '[Juvenal] incorporates gastronomic lore that truffles grow most tender in spring and most vigorously in thunderstorms (Plin. *N.H.* 19.37), a tradition rejected by Plutarch at *Qu. Conv.* 4.2 = *Mor.* 66<sub>4</sub>b–66<sub>5</sub>e.'

dishes discussed so far. In lines 120–124, Juvenal describes a carver, whose office was to slice a hare and a hen, which he did with artistic flourishes. The humble client is compelled to watch the carving of the meat while the others are eating, and “spectes” emphasizes his role as mere spectator.<sup>53</sup> The lack of a contrasting image is the more telling because Trebius didn’t get a share in this part of the meal;<sup>54</sup> he was only watching.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusions

Several scholars have argued convincingly that satire and food are inextricably linked in a number of ways. My purpose in this article has been largely introductory in seeking to walk through what has seemed to me an interesting pattern of visual emphasis on food in Horace’s *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal’s *cena Virronis*. The two *cenae* mainly present us with food for the eye. The question which now needs to be addressed is: why do these two *cenae* come to be looked upon as spectacles, both carefully planned to provide plenty of food attractive to the eye, with less care –if my reading of the two *cenae* is correct– whether the food tastes appetising and/or whether the food smells appealing? In what follows, I will shortly offer a few considerations which could contribute to some extent to this multidimensional issue.

When looked at from a content standpoint, the stress placed on the food’s visual features in the *cena Nasidieni* can be read as yet another argument for the fondness for culinary expertise and ostentation. In the *cena Virronis*, the difference in the size and colour of the foodstuffs served Virro and those served Trebius vividly illustrates the gap between host and lower-status guest. However, a polemic against the excessive refinements of gastronomy and against the ill-treatment of poor clients by their wealthy patrons forms only one side of the picture in Horace’s Satire 2, 8 and Juvenal’s Satire 5, respectively. The other side is taken up by satire’s fundamental pretext to un-

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<sup>53</sup> BRAUND (1996: 296 *ad* 120–124) and COURTNEY (2013: 211 *ad loc.*).

<sup>54</sup> MORFORD (1977: 234).

<sup>55</sup> RIMELL (2005: 84) well observes that Trebius leaves the dining room even hungrier.

mask folly, to strip the skin off society, revealing the rot beneath the shining exterior. Both *cenae* seem biased towards the distinction between appearance and inner worth, caustically lending more emphasis to externals. Within the context of satire's moral mission, the act of removing flashy, glinting surfaces to reveal the lurking despicability at the core becomes a full-out battle on the decline in the moral standing of Rome. The satirists inspect and brand what deserves to be assailed; their personal observations provide the material of their satires. And it is actually through the eyes that Horace and Juvenal find an effective way of involving their audience, testing their moral sensibility, and requiring their critical judgement as well. The satirist and his audience are in the relationship of director and spectator, respectively. From the 'visual food' which abounds in the two dinners, it can be inferred that when referring to Horace's *cena Nasidieni* and Juvenal's *cena Virronis*, it is more accurate to talk of 'visual taste' rather than of actual taste.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>It bears mentioning, too, that the food-miscellany presented in the two dinners can also be interpreted as a metapoetic reference to *satira* itself. Lack of space forbids dilation on this topic; the main points are to be found in FERRIS-HILL (2022: 68ff.).



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