however, how serious he is, for when the old man has been sent to summon four men to carry Menaechmus away, and asks the doctor to keep an eye on Menaechmus, he refuses, leaves the patient unattended and goes off home to prepare things there (l. 954 ff); he is guilty of either negligence or foolishness here — or both. The scene with the doctor is, to my mind, one of the most interesting and amusing in the play, not only because of what we learn about the ideas and practice of medicine in the time of Plautus, but also because this scene shows us that human beings have not changed much since Plautus’ day.

NOTES

1. I owe this suggestion to Professor W. H. Hewitt of Rhodes University, Grahamstown, who raised the point in discussion at the CASA Conference in January, 1983, where this paper was presented.

2. quandoque ista gens suas litteras dabit, omnia corrumpent, tum etiam magis si medicos suos huc mittet. iurarunt inter se barbaros necare omnes medicina (apud Plin. Nat. Hist. 29.1.14).

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TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF JUVENAL SATIRE 11

1

Juvenal’s eleventh satire takes the form of ‘a disquisition about an invitation to dinner’1 addressed to Persicus, who is already in receipt of the invitation. Ostensibly Persicus is a friend of the poet and the meal is a simple one. But doubts have been expressed about the degree of friendship between the two personae of the poem, the speaker and the addressee, which is revealed by the poet, and it is suggested that Persicus’ tastes are rather more luxurious2 than is in keeping with such a simple meal. A poem of stolid ad hominem irony results from the bare opposition of two ways of life. But this impression is misleading. I propose here to consider two passages in order to throw a new light on the tone and direction of
the poem. The passages are chosen for their importance for understanding the whole poem: the menu and the resumption of the ‘invitation’ in the final lines.

2

experiere Hodie numquid pulcherrima dictu,
Persico, non praestem (tibi) vita et moribus et re,
si laudem siliquas occultus ganeo, pultes
-coram alis dictem puero sed in aure placetas.

fercula nunc audi nullis ornata macellis. (Juvi.11.56–59; 64)

So begins the passage explaining the menu to Persicus. The reference to siliquas and pultes, the Horatian feel of fercula nullis ornata macellis and the subsequent mention of a Tiburtine ager suggest a particular atmosphere, that of the simple country-produce meal. But no sooner does he mention porridge and beans than Juvenal ignores them and offers a selection of food which, though basically similar to that offered by the plain Ofellus, is expanded and coloured in an unpredicted manner. First on the list, instead of Ofellus’ haedus, is a pinguissimus haedulus which is given nearly four lines of tantalising description: it is the tenderest goatling of the flock, innocent of grass and willow, unweaned—more full of milk than blood. A very delicate and easily digestible piece of meat, one would say, and also uneconomical: a thrifty farmer would have waited till it provided more meat.

The next item is similarly disturbing: fresh picked montani asparagi. Asparagus is one of the items on Virro’s table and also appears as a delicacy at that of Metellus Pius, but unlike the ubiquitous oyster it does not appear much in Roman moralising literature. It required careful cultivation, but there were wilder varieties which, while they might rival the best in flavour, were hardly luxuries. So much suits the purported simplicity of the meal. But it is also clear that asparagus was regarded as beneficial to the health and specifically to the stomach. And the wilder the variety the better. Juvenal’s is the mountain asparagus, wilder than cultivated asparagus (the luxury kind) and presumably akin to the healthful kind of Philemon. It is virtually health-food.

Passing over the next item we find this aspect confirmed explicitly in the lines on the fruit. Not only is the quality outstanding, but the fact that it is not harmful to the health assumes morbid proportions:

nec metuenda tibi, siccatum frigore postquam
autumnunm et crudi posuere pericula suci. (Juvi.11.75–76)

These are the impressions arising from the menu itself; but by the end of the poem another doubt suggests itself; de Tiburtino veniet agro and posito quos legit vilica fuso seem to suggest that the meal is to be held at the Tiburtine estate; that the asparagus is freshly picked is insinuated by the detail posito fuso. But at 197–198 we discover that the setting is Rome. At this point fercula ornata macellis begin to sound more ordinary than the haedulus and asparagus specially brought
in from the country; an effect intensified by the conspicuous absence of the porridge and beans mentioned shortly before on the menu.

3

Doubts have been expressed about Persicus. The name itself is suggestive. The name itself is suggestive. I have argued that the meal Juvenal offers him is designed to titillate his palate and relieve his (jaded) stomach. This provides the poem with a brilliant ending:

\[ \text{iam nunc in balnea salva} \]

\[ \text{fronte lictet vadas, quamquam solida hora supersit} \]

\[ \text{ad sextam. (Juv. 11. 204–206)} \]

Persicus has not yet come to the estate on which the meal is to be held so that \textit{iam nunc} refers to what Persicus may do on his own account before coming to Juvenal: bathe, that is, at an unprecedented hour and do so shamelessly. But Juvenal says \textit{facere hoc non possis quinque diebus/ continuis, quia sunt tali quaque taedia vitae}. \textit{Hoc} and \textit{talis} refer to Persicus’ way of life and not to one offered him by Juvenal: even Persicus’ life of early bathing and concomitant luxury must become tedious if pursued and Juvenal therefore offers his effete addressee a day off decadence as if to allow him to return to it all the fresher (hence the rehabilitating menu):

\[ \text{for voluptates commendat rarior usus; voluptates, that is, like those of Persicus. The brilliant ironic sententia brings out the significance of the so-called simple dinner.} \]

4

Food is a perennial topos of ancient moralising and in this satire Juvenal has parodied its simplistic forms. This is clear as early as the introduction where we find the absurd logic (38–53): ‘What do gluttons come to in the end? Beggary. They’re not afraid of an early death, but of [poor] old age. This is the sequence: borrowing at Rome, using the loans up, and — ’ (suicide is the obvious moralistic climax, prepared for by 44–45 and by the mention of Apicius in 3) ‘— they abscond to Baiae; and the oysters [49]. For a year [53]’. But while the parody cuts away the dead wood of the conventions it leaves the satiric impetus against the type represented by Persicus unimpeded.

NOTES

2. Courtney, BICS 13 (1966) 43; Pryor, BICS 16 (1969) 170; Courtney, pp. 491–492; Ferguson, n. at Juv. 11. 57. For 186–189 cf. 8. 128–130, a similar ‘digression’ on the wife’s faults which should also be justified as \textit{ad hominem}.
3. See Courtney a. l. for text.
4. Cf. Hor. S. 2. 2. 120ff.
5. See Courtney, n. at 65. To his list of poets add Catullus (44). Most of all Horace’s Sabine farm (or Tiburtine? Cf. Catull 44. 1–5 and Hor. Epp. 1. 7. 45; 1. 8. 12 and see Dilke’s edition, p. 9) is in the air.

7. Hor. S. 2.2.120 sqq. Courtney (n. at 64) marks some resemblances between the passages. Pope clearly associated the two, since in his adaptation of this section of the Horace the phrase 'what my Thames affords' (142) recalls *de Tuburtino agro* rather than anything in Horace (not a unique occurrence in Pope's Horatian poems). The two passages are clearly comparable, and there may be some conscious allusion.

8. *Haedulus* is a unique diminutive. The nearest parallel is a term of endearment in Plaut. As.3.3.77, *haedillus*.

9. Contrast *vitulus* at 12.7–9 and the *haedus* in Hor. 0.3.13.

10. Juv.5.82.


12. Lucil. 133M; context is probably a contrast between old morality and modern corruption; Pliny *NH* 19.54, *heu predigia ventris!* But such examples are rare.

13. Pliny *NH* 19.145; cf. Cato RR 161; Col.11.3.43ff.


15. A.P. 11.413.


17. Pliny *NH* 20.108; *inter utilissimos stomacho cibos asparagi traduntur*. Cf. Celsus 2.29; 2.31.

18. Pliny *NH* 20.110.


20. One of the αὔρια at Philemon fr.98 K, and said to be part of a sick man’s diet.

21. Healthy food may also be simple, and a casual reading of Celsus gives the impression that for Roman medicine almost any food has almost unlimited medical uses. But if Pliny’s *inter utilissimos* (cited n.17) is not enough there is confirmation in this case in the sequel. Also the spondaic ending here (68 and reinforced by 71; cf.133 and 138) enhances the impression of softness/faddiness/concern for health which emerges from the meaning of the words. On spondaic ends see Quint. 9.4.65 and cf. Pers. 1.95.

22. Eggs and chicken (Olelus’ pullus); for *ova ipsa cum matribus* commentators cite Ov. Fasti 4.696 and Mart. 7.31.1: neither provides a parallel for serving eggs with the same hens that had laid them as part of a dinner. An extravagant practice and not one likely to produce a perceptibly greater harmony of flavours than usual. Rather it seems to titillate the palate by the novelty of the idea. One is reminded of Trimalchio.

23. Signian and Syrian pears are choice (Col. 5.10.18) and recommended by Celsus (2.24). One may doubt whether these are domi nata.

While fruit is always an element of the valetudinarian’s diet it does not give proof on its own. Here Juvenal’s language provides the evidence, being more exaggerated than the technical sources.

24. Hence the difference from Mart.10.48.7–8.

25. Cf. Courtney, pp. 17 and 492; Ferguson, n. a.1.1. By far the best known Persicus was the consul of A.D.34, for whom see Sen. *se ben.* 2.21.5; 4.30.2 and Courtney at Juv.8.13 (where read *Paulus* for Q. In Roman verse the name only occurs here and at Juv. 3.221. *Persicus* = Persian and hence splendid (cf. Juv. 14.328; Varro *Men.* 36B; Plaut. *Sta.* 24–25). Perhaps, given Juvenal’s context, also relevant are *persicum* = peach at Pliny *NH* 15.42 and Mart. 13.46; cf. Col. 5.10.20; 9.4; Pall. 1.3.

26. See Juv.11.56 and 60.


28. Quoque is *ad hominem* (‘even yours!’).

29. Cf. Plato *Phaed* 60bc.

30. The language used for the *haedulus* and the idea of the eggs with their hens are designed to incite interest in a jaded palate.

31. See e.g.: Hor.S.2.2; 2.4.2.8; Pers. 2 (see E. Flintoff, *Hermes* 110 (1982) 341–354, esp. 346 n.11); Juv.4; 5. The inclusion in connection with the dogfood at Gratt. *Cyneg.* 307ff shows the triteness and range of use.

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