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Author(s): EDWIN S. RAMAGE

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Method and Structure in the Satires of Persius

EDWIN S. RAMAGE

Over the last twenty years or so, Persius' satiric approach and method have attracted considerable scholarly attention, but one aspect of the satires that has not been adequately studied is Persius' use of the second person address.¹ This is a one-on-one approach in which the satirist speaks in the first person to, with, or at a variety of second persons. The device is so much a part of Persius' method that our natural reaction is to take it for granted as we read, at most ascribing it to the influence of the Cynic-Stoic diatribe. But a closer look suggests its importance for the argumentation, poetic development, and structure of the individual satires, as well as for the general impression that the poems leave.

THE METHOD IN THE SATIRES

Persius addresses at least four different groups of second persons in his satires. First, and least important for our purposes, is a category that includes gods (2.39 f., 3.35–37), priests (2.69), and well-known people from the past (1.73–75, 1.87, 1.115, 6.79 f.), where the poet is aiming for vividness, variety, and emphasis. A second kind of addressee is Persius' reader or listener. He does not speak directly to his reader very often, but it should be noticed that when he does, the satirist makes him the second person subject of the verb *credo* (Prol. 14; 4.1). More important is what might be called the address to a friend—Macrinus in Satire 2, Cornutus in 5, and Bassus in 6—which the satirist inherited from the earlier satiric and epistolary traditions. We shall look at these more closely later, but two points should be made here: Persius never addresses a friend without

¹ Most of the bibliography since 1956 is gathered together in U. Knoche (transl. E. S. Ramage), *Roman Satire* (Bloomington, 1975), pp. 207 f., 224–226; see also p. 170, n. 19. At least three other studies should be added to those listed there: F. Villeneuve, *Essai sur Perse* (Paris, 1918); E. V. Marmorale, *Persio*² (Florence, 1956); J. C. Bramble, *Persius and the Programmatic Satire* (Cambridge, 1974).

naming him, and Macrinus, Cornutus, and Bassus all appear at the beginning of their satires and all quickly disappear.²

But the most common and most important addressee in these poems is the vague, unnamed second person to whom the poet as satirist/adviser (*s/a*) directs much of his criticism and advice. It predominates in the satires, occurring almost 80 percent of the time, and for this reason deserves our close attention here.

Both *s/a* and second person recipient remain unnamed throughout, except for an episode in Satire 4 involving Socrates and Alcibiades (1–22), which, as we shall see, is a well-motivated variation on the theme. While we do not need to be told who the *s/a* is, the recipient remains as vague as possible. In fact, there are two points at which the poet shows that he is consciously maintaining this vagueness. In the first satire, where the recipient is present throughout, the *s/a* at one point (44) prefaces a comment to him with the words, “Whoever you are whom I have just set speaking against me, . . .” The fact that the comment begins a speech and that the words neatly fill a line help to make the statement stand out. Persius is telling us here that the adversary or recipient is a vague second person “straw man” and that the poem is really not a dialogue at all.³ The second instance occurs in Satire 6 (41 f.), when the *s/a* begins his address to the heir who becomes the recipient at this point: “But as for you, whoever you are who will be my heir, . . .”

There is at least one instance in which the satirist promotes this ambiguity by shifting suddenly from the second person singular to the plural and back again. This happens in the third satire (63–76), where the recipient begins as a singular (64: *videas*) and in the same line becomes a plural (*occurrite*). The plural is maintained in the imperatives *discite* and *cognoscite* (66), but the next reference, some five lines later, is singular (71: *te*), and so are those in the next two lines (72: *locatus es*; 73: *disce nec invideas*), where *invideas* recalls *videas* at the beginning. This intentional mixing of singular and plural seems intended to generalize the recipient still further. Not only is he unnamed and vague, then, but he is even singular or plural.⁴

² Macrinus disappears after 2.4 and Bassus is not referred to again after 6.6, so that these dedications appear almost perfunctory. We naturally contrast them with the more elaborate address to Cornutus in Satire 5 (19–64).

³ Although he does not use this line as evidence, G. L. Hendrickson, some forty years ago, observed that this satire is not a dialogue: “The First Satire of Persius,” *C.P.* 23 (1928), 103.

⁴ There are other examples in Satire 1 that are not quite parallel to this one. At 1.11 a plural *ignoscite* suddenly appears; in 1.61 f. there is a shift from the singular recipient to a plural recipient, the patricians; at 1.111 f., after moving to the plural (111: *eritis*), the poet shifts back to the singular (112: *inquis*).

Generally speaking, however, the satirist simply takes full advantage of the natural vagueness of the second personal verb or pronoun when it is not related to a subject or antecedent.

What is the result of this one-on-one approach? In the first place, it helps create a strongly didactic atmosphere. It is almost a tutorial situation, with the *s/a* offering criticism and advice to a recipient who apparently needs it. When he wants to use examples, the *s/a* brings them in via the first person plural and the third person singular and plural.⁵

There are other indications of a didactic purpose in the satires. The third satire is really a statement of the need for a proper education and the right application of it. "You're just damp, soft clay," the *s/a* tells his recipient: "Now, right now, you have to be whirled around on the swift wheel and shaped without stopping" (3.23 f.). In the first line of the fourth satire Socrates, the *s/a*, is called a *magister* or "teacher." Throughout the satires vocabulary of teaching and learning is used by the *s/a* in addressing the recipient, much of it in the imperative.⁶ And there are many jussives and imperatives that are natural components of the language of teaching.⁷ All of these combine to produce the heavily didactic atmosphere that pervades the satires.

This emphasis on the one-on-one relationship between *s/a* and recipient also helps to produce an atmosphere of isolation in the satires. These two

⁵ It is important to notice that Persius never admits directly to having faults (see also below, note 13). He does, however, include himself in the first person plural where he effectively dilutes his own shortcomings by making them part of humanity's. For want of a better designation we shall call this the collective "we." Examples: 1.13: *scribimus*, where the context has already told us that he is actually not part of this group; 2.62 and 71: *nostros, damus*, in a passage where the *s/a* ends up being the proper example (75); 3.3, 12, 14, and 16: *stertimus, querimur, querimur, venimus*, where, *pace* Housman (see below, note 13), Persius is at best one of a group of "sinners"; 4.42 f.: *caedimus, praebemus, novimus*, where we hardly think of the *s/a* as being included; 5.68: *consumpsimus*, where the criticism really involves the procrastinators, and not the *s/a*.

The third person examples are too easily recognized to need elaboration. They range all the way from a centurion (3.77) or centurions (5.189) to individuals putting forward the wrong prayers (2.8–14).

⁶ There is a surprisingly large number of examples: 1.30, 2.31, 5.68: *ecce* ("look!" "look here!"); 2.17: *age, responde* ("come, answer me this!" a Socratic touch); 2.42, 6.52: *age* ("come now!"); 3.66: *discite . . . cognoscite* ("learn!" "get to know!"); 3.73, 5.91: *disce* ("learn!"); 4.3, 6.51: *dic* ("tell me!" another Socratic touch); 4.52: *noris* ("get to know!"); 6.42: *audi* ("listen!").

⁷ The satires contain many of these; a few examples will suffice: 1.5–7: *non . . . accedas examene . . . castiges . . . nec . . . quaesiveris*; 6.25 f.: *messe tenus propria vive et granaria (fas est) | emole*; 6.65: *fuge quaerere*. Satire 4 contains no fewer than twelve imperatives and jussives. The ones involving the recipient are listed in note 6. The others with didactic overtones include 19 f.: *expecta, i, suffla* (ironic); 45: *da, decipe* (also ironic); 51 f.: *respue, tollat, habita*.

participants are constantly and consistently separated from the rest of society, except when they are included in the general or collective “we” of the Roman or Italian populace, or of humanity in general.⁸ They also leave the impression of being isolated because “we,” “he,” and “they” that make up the rest of society provide the negative examples that the *s/a* chooses for his recipient.⁹

This theme of isolation runs through the satires. In fact, Persius sets the mood in the Prologue by candidly separating himself from poets and poetry of the past, and by rejecting his contemporaries.¹⁰ This rejection is developed at length in the first satire. The satirist will have nothing to do with contemporary literature, whose depravities reflect those of contemporary society; he ostensibly cares little about a reading public (2 f., 119 f.); he professes to have no worries about the effect his satire is having (110–114); he recommends isolation to his recipient (5–7); and he even describes the important message that he has as something “hidden” (1.121: *opertum*).

Again, in Satire 5, after rejecting contemporary pretentiousness yet another time, Persius says *he* is speaking privately (5.21). Toward the beginning of Satire 6 we find that he has physically isolated himself from Rome and Romans by moving to his country estate and that he wants to make sure that we and Bassus know this. “Here I am free and safe from the mob,” he says (6.12), and he repeats the adjective *securus* in the next line. The same desire for seclusion appears a little later, when the *s/a* overtly takes his heir to one side to make certain that he listens to what he is saying (6.42: *paulum a turba seductior audi*). Horace gets caught in the Roman Forum (*Sat.* 1.9) or bustling about Rome (*Sat.* 2.6.20–58); Juvenal stands on the street corner taking notes (*Sat.* 1.63 f.); Persius carefully takes his heir into a quiet corner to talk to him.

A third purpose that the use of the *s/a* and recipient accomplishes is to focus attention on the individual. In this connection, there is an important statement early in the first satire that should probably be taken as

⁸ See above, note 5. Though the immediate situation is quite different, we can feel these isolationist tendencies in Persius’ description of his friendship with Cornutus (5.19–51). What he has in effect done is to set up another one-on-one relationship with Cornutus. See the analysis of Satire 5, below.

⁹ In a general article on the subject, Anderson shows that Persius rejects society and that this is a point of view quite different from that of the other satirists: W. S. Anderson, “Persius and the Rejection of Society,” in *Wissenschaftl. Zeitschr. der Univ. Rostock* 15 (1966), 409–416.

¹⁰ E. S. Ramage, D. L. Sigsbee, S. C. Fredericks, *Roman Satirists and Their Satire* (Park Ridge, N.J., 1974), p. 116.

programmatic for the satires as a whole (5–7). When the discussion of contemporary literature has barely begun, the *s/a* turns to his recipient and says, “If Rome in its confused state disparages something, don’t run up and fix the balance that’s out of kilter and don’t go looking for anything that’s outside yourself.” There may be a rejection of society here, but it is not complete nihilism, for, negative and sententious though the statement may appear, it is Persius’ way of saying that if we are going to have faith in anything, it should be the individual.

As we make our way through the satires, we find the individual to the forefront most of the time. In the first satire Persius by himself opposes popular opinion, taste, and mores. Private or individual prayers are the subject of Satire 2, where the *s/a* alone is represented as having the solution (75). Satire 3 deals with the education and improvement of the individual. Here the metaphor from pottery making (23 f.) quoted earlier is particularly apt, since pots are turned one at a time. The eloquent list of things to be learned that appears a little later in the poem (66–72), to a large extent involves matters of one’s own worth and personal identity. There is no need to stress the emphasis on the individual that permeates the fourth satire, with its exhortation to “know thyself.” The last two lines (51 f.) provide an eloquent summary: “Reject what you are not; have the mob take back its favors. Live with yourself and come to realize how sparse your furnishings are.” In Satire 5 (52 f.) Persius expresses a clear recognition of the individual: “There are a thousand kinds of men and their experience differs widely. Everyone has his own desires and people don’t live with a single prayer.” This is an appropriate preamble to the subject of the satire, which is the nature of personal freedom. Finally, Satire 6 focuses on the proper attitude of the individual to wealth.

The one-on-one relationship between *s/a* and recipient reinforces this emphasis in the satires, for it is a practical example of how the education or enlightenment of the individual might take place. Actually, it is one end of the spectrum—the beginning of the educational process. The other end is represented by the relationship between Persius and Cornutus (5.19–64). This personal association has grown over a long period of time, from vague and tenuous beginnings to an ideal, clearly defined partnership for life based on mutual respect.

The one-on-one device that we have been talking about serves yet another purpose: it focuses our attention on the *s/a* and his criticism or advice. He is forceful, positive, and outspoken; generally he speaks with conviction. The recipient, on the other hand, is thoroughly vague, and most of the time blends into the surrounding scenery because he is simply a tacit listener. But even when he has a larger part to play, as he does in

the first satire, he is little more than a straw man presenting maudlin, wrong, or at least unacceptable sentiments, which are ultimately grist for the critical mill of his opponent. And here is another reason for our focusing on the *s/a*. The recipient is actually a negative character who has gone wrong in his actions or thinking or who threatens to go wrong. There is no need to dwell on this; we need only think of the adversary in Satire 1, Alcibiades in 4, or the heir in 6. By contrast, the *s/a* is assumed to be or is represented as the positive example of what he is promoting. This clearly lies behind the argument of Satire 1, coming to a climax in the last monologue (114–134). At the end of Satire 2 we catch sight of the *s/a* as the one who is ideally prepared to make a proper prayer. By associating himself with Cornutus in 5 Persius shows he is the ideal *sapiens*, and we cannot forget this as we read the rest of the poem containing his account of true individual freedom. In Satire 6 he appears both as one who knows how to utter a proper prayer (22) and as a person who is fully aware of the proper use of money (12–24, 25–80, esp. 41–74).¹¹

There is a final purpose that this device seems to serve. It is apparently a way of bringing in the reader and thus providing a more general application of the criticism and advice that is being put forward. Persius nowhere states that this is his purpose, but it is a natural reaction on the part of the reader or listener to take much of what is directed at a vague “you” as being directed beyond the satires to himself.

Before turning to the individual satires to see how the one-on-one method works out in practice, something must be said about origins. This is not the place to get into a long discussion of where Persius found the device and how he adapted it to his own uses. For present purposes it will be sufficient to point to the Cynic–Stoic diatribe as the most likely source. Even a glance at the reported diatribes of Epictetus suggests clear comparisons.¹²

¹¹ The beginning of Satire 3 presents a problem if we take the young man who is snoring his life away as being Persius. But see note 13.

¹² Cf. Villeneuve (above, note 1), pp. 119–140, 154–184. Diatribe had influenced Roman satire from the beginning. The few remaining fragments of Ennius’ satires show traces of it (Knoche [above, note 1], pp. 25, 29; Ramage, Sigsbee, Fredericks [above, note 10], pp. 19, 20), and so do the more extensive remains of Lucilius (Ramage, Sigsbee, Fredericks, pp. 34, 35, 40, 43).

Horace makes use of the diatribe, but his approach is quite different from that of Persius. It appears in five satires only (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.3, and 2.7). In the first three satires there is a clearer alternation between third person examples and direct address to the recipient. While the recipient is the focus of Horace’s attention, the one-on-one relationship is not as tight as it is in Persius, and we do not feel the same isolation that the *s/a* and recipient in Persius leave. In 2.3 and 2.7 Horace is to a large extent satirizing the

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SATIRES

A detailed look at each of the poems will give a better idea of the part that the *s/a* and his recipient have to play in Persius' satires. For purposes of clarity the analysis of each satire, with one exception, is prefaced by an outline in which not only passages involving the *s/a* and recipient are taken into account, but also those in which Persius uses address to a friend, the collective "we," the third person, or an impersonal approach. Satire 1 will be left to the end, since our examination of it will benefit from looking at the other satires first.

SATIRE TWO

<i>Lines</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1-4	address to friend	Macrinus' birthday
5-14	third sing.	improper prayers: examples
15-60	<i>s/a</i> -recip.	prayers: problem
61-70	impersonal	generalization of problem
71-75	coll. "we"; <i>s/a</i> alone	solution: general and personal

As has already been noted, the satire begins with a second personal address to a friend, Macrinus, who disappears immediately after Persius' observation that his friend is not in the habit of uttering improper prayers (4). This leads naturally to a series of examples of such prayers (5-14), all of them in the third person (5: *bona pars procerum*; 6: *civis*; 9: *illa*). The examples are an important introduction to the problem, but the passage also serves another function. The heavy emphasis on the third person singular—all the verbs but two (13: *impello*, *expungam*) are in this form, and these two are part of the direct quotation from a third person—provides a kind of buffer between the address to Macrinus and that to the recipient which follows. As we shall see, this occurs again in a different form in Satires 5 and 6.

Immediately after this list of prayers (15) the *s/a* suddenly turns to his vague, unnamed recipient and begins the discussion that takes up most

diatribe method as he satirizes the philosophy that spawned it. Here the one-on-one is quite different, for both *s/a* and recipient are named, and in both cases Horace the recipient turns the tables on the *s/a* at the end of the satire. The strong element of burlesque and humor in both satires should also not be overlooked.

of the rest of the satire. This falls into three parts, thus helping to avoid the tedium of a lengthy tirade. The *s/a* first adopts a Socratean style and puts before his recipient a series of probing questions on attitudes to the gods (17–30). He then turns to the example of the maternal aunt, using a prefacing *ecce* to draw his discussant’s attention (and ours, too) to her and her prayers (31–40). Finally he returns, in a long section, to point out how wrong his adversary is to wish for a long life and great wealth, and how his materialistic outlook has affected his treatment of the gods (41–60). This arrangement not only provides the variety already mentioned, but it also enables Persius to get at the problem from a number of different angles.

The problem is now consciously generalized (61–70) with an address to souls in general (61), the use of *iuvat* (62) and the collective “we” (62: *nostros*), and the concentration on *pulpa* or “flesh” (63–68). By contrast, the solution is put in terms of the collective “we” (71: *damus*), which is actually a step on the way to the first person of the satirist or *s/a* who represents the right solution on a personal level (75).

Persius seems to have planned his use of the *s/a*-recipient in Satire 2 very carefully, since he makes it physically its centerpiece. Here as elsewhere this device is used to develop an account of the problem, and the return of the *s/a* in the last line of the satire serves to remind us of the method and the problem as the personal solution is presented.

SATIRE THREE

<i>Lines</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1–14	coll. “we” (<i>s/a</i> -recip.)— coll. “we”	improper living: example
15–62	<i>s/a</i> -recip.	education: problem
63–76	<i>s/a</i> -recip.	education: solution
77–118	third sing.— <i>s/a</i> -recip.	three sceptical attitudes

This is a difficult poem and its difficulties are reflected in its structure. Persius deals here with the need for a proper philosophical education and the right application of it. He begins by using what appears to be the collective “we” (3: *stertimus*) to describe an example—the person who reveals a lack of direction and purpose in his life by spending his time carousing and sleeping it off. Almost immediately one of his companions (7) addresses him in a variation of the one-on-one approach (5: *en quid agis?*). The poet then moves back to the collective first person to elaborate

the problems of those who cannot get down to writing but instead spend their time inventing excuses (12, 14: *querimur*).¹³

This introduction is followed by a long passage containing a broader discussion of the problem (15–62) and a solution (63–76) in which the *s/a* addresses the vague second person recipient throughout. The collective “we” appears at the beginning (16: *venimus*), along with the vocative address to the recipient (15: *miser . . . miser*), to provide a bridge between the two parts. The *s/a* points first to the need for a proper philosophical education (15–34; esp. 23 f.), and then turns from his recipient for a moment to address Jupiter as he points out the ramifications of not having such training (35–43). There is no indication that the recipient is being spoken to as the speaker moves on to make the point that early in life a person cannot really be expected to know what is proper (44–51), but it is clear that he has been addressing the recipient, because he suddenly points a finger at him and chides him for having had the training, but still not knowing how to live (52–62). With *stertis* (58) and the rest of this line and the next, the *s/a* gives every indication of returning to the point at which the satire began, when he suddenly generalizes the discussion by asking the recipient whether he has any purpose in life or whether he is simply “playing it by ear” (60–62: . . . *ex tempore vivis?*).

He now turns to the solution or cure for the problem that he has outlined (63–76), with *elleborum*, the first word in the passage, metaphorically announcing the topic. These lines have already been discussed, and we need only remind ourselves of the interplay of singular and plural, and the heavy didacticism that run through them.

To this point Satire 3 has followed the pattern of the second satire:

¹³ More than sixty years ago A. E. Housman suggested that Persius had himself in mind at the beginning of Satire 3 (“Notes on Persius,” *C.Q.* 7 [1913], 16 f.). Although G. L. Hendrickson calls it “fanciful” but “by no means impossible” (“The Third Satire of Persius,” *C.P.* 23 [1928], 333), the view has been widely accepted, most recently by R. Jenkinson (“Interpretations of Persius’ Satires III and IV,” *Latomus* 32 [1973], 534 f.). But if this is Persius in these lines, then, as has already been pointed out, it is the only place in the satires where the satirist appears in a negative light (see above, note 5). The personal account a little later (44–51) does not militate against this, since Persius points out that he was young (44: *parvus*) when he tricked his teacher and that this kind of thing was only to be expected (48: *iure*) at that age. It might also be argued that the first person plural (3: *stertinus*) softens the connection, serving as a collective “we” (see above, note 5) and so making Persius at best just one of humanity that is in the habit of sleeping away its life. Indeed, the recurrence of the first person plural (12, 14, 16) helps to leave the impression throughout these lines that Persius does not have himself in mind, but people in general. It is true that the unnamed companion does address the snorer or one of the snorers in the second person singular (5: *en quid agis?*); but this should not bother us, since it is a variation of the *s/a*-recipient arrangement, with the companion playing the *s/a*, and we would expect the recipient to be unnamed.

example(s), general discussion of the problem, and solution. But no two satires of Persius are alike, and, besides, this tripartite arrangement is more characteristic of philosophy than it is of satire. And so the satire ends with three examples of people who for one reason or another are not receptive to the advice which Persius has given. A large cross section of the population simply closes its ears to the whole idea (77–87). Another person takes the advice so long as it is expedient and then forgets about it, so that he represents the group that has the answers but refuses to use them (88–106). A third type honestly believes it does not need this kind of direction (107–118). The first two examples are in the third person and the last one promises to take this form also. But the direct quotation (107–109) is actually a transition between the previous two examples and the negative ending, where the *s/a* returns to speak to his recipient once again and tells him how failure to get and use this proper direction is ultimately a form of insanity. The reference to Stoicism is clear, but the satire ends on a satiric, and not a philosophic note.

SATIRE FOUR

<i>Lines</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1–22	<i>s/a</i> -recip. (Socrates and Alcibiades)	lack of self-knowledge: example
23–50	<i>s/a</i> -recip.	self-knowledge: problem
51 f.	<i>s/a</i> -recip.	self-knowledge: solution

The whole of the fourth satire is developed by means of the *s/a*-recipient method, with the poet using two sets of discussants. Socrates is the *s/a* addressing Alcibiades, the recipient, for the first twenty-two lines, and then the unnamed *s/a* and vague recipient take over. In the first section, a Greek atmosphere is maintained by a careful scattering of Greek words and names: *Pericli* (3), *theta* (13), *Anticyras* (16), *Dinomaches* (20: with a Greek genitive ending), *Baucis* (21), *ocima* (22). The second section, on the other hand, is full of Roman words, things, and ideas: *Vettidi* (25), *Curibus* (26), *genio* (27), *compita* (28), *balteus* (44), *puteal* (49). This is not to say that the division of words is strictly maintained, for nothing is ever that simple in Persius.¹⁴ The division, however, does exist.¹⁵

¹⁴ Words with Roman connotations appear in the first section (*plebecula* [6], *Quirites* [8], *popello* [15]), thus keeping Rome in sight. D. Bo observes that Persius “*res ita agit ac suo more novat ut haud raro potius Romae quam Athenis esse videamur et quemdam stoicum philosophum, Seneca severiorem, audire Neronem monentem, . . .*” (*A. Persi Flacci saturarum liber* [Turin, 1969], p. 70). The most obvious examples of Greek words in the second section are *gausape* (37) and *palaestrita* (39).

¹⁵ The general statement that suddenly appears at 23 f. signals the new section, and the rest of the satire proceeds from this. Persius does much the same thing in Satire 5,

This variation of the one-on-one approach involving Socrates and Alcibiades serves as a specific example of the problem under discussion, that is, the importance of getting to know oneself. Normally Persius would make Alcibiades the subject of a third person statement, but here he has chosen to vary his method. When we realize this, it becomes clear that this satire shows much the same development in content as the second satire and the first seventy-six lines of Satire 3. A more general discussion of the problem (23–50) is prefaced by a universal statement (23 f.) and leads eventually to a collective “we” (42 f.). The final two lines of the satire give the solution, this time in an imperative form addressed to the recipient.

SATIRE FIVE

<i>Lines</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1–4	impersonal	desire for eloquence
5–18	s/a (Cornutus?)- recip. (Persius)	P. has his own eloquence
19–64	address to friend	eloquent tribute to C.
64–72	s/a-recip.	call to philosophy
73–90	third sing. (traces of s/a-recip.)	true freedom misconceived: example
91–160	s/a-recip.	true freedom: problem
161–175	s/a-recip.	true freedom: solution
176–191	s/a-recip.	examples of a lack of freedom

The fifth satire is often pointed to as the most successful of Persius' satires, and this is reflected in the methods he uses. A glance at the summary above shows a satisfying variety of approach in which content and method blend to produce a unity for the poem.

The opening statement (1–4) is mildly surprising on two counts: it is completely impersonal and might be taken as an exaggerated plea for eloquence. But when we remember what Persius has said about contemporary poets and their poetry in his Prologue and in Satire 1, the overtones of irony that are present in these lines begin to make themselves felt.

Suddenly someone begins criticizing this demand for a hundred voices, mouths, and tongues as the satirist develops a variation of the one-on-one technique (5–18). Here Persius becomes the unnamed recipient, while it

when he announces freedom as his subject (73: *libertate opus est*). In 6 his announcement takes the form of a metaphor (25 f.). The first line of Satire 1 falls into the same category, though it applies to all the satires.

appears that Cornutus is the *s/a*.¹⁶ This substitution is thoroughly appropriate, since, as we learn a little later, the relationship between Cornutus and Persius has been one of teacher (adviser) and student (recipient).

Now follows an address to a friend, with Persius speaking directly to Cornutus (19–64). The poet wants his eloquence so that he can praise Cornutus (19–29), and he proceeds to do so pointing to their close friendship (30–51) and to the fact that Cornutus' chosen profession is philosophical teaching (52–64).

At this point Persius becomes the *s/a* and turns smoothly to address children and old men—in other words, everyone—as second person recipients, telling them to seek their knowledge from Cornutus and bridling at their procrastination (64–72). The plural (64: *petite*) effectively separates this group from Cornutus who has just been addressed in the second person singular, but *hinc* (64) provides a connection between teacher and potential students. Soon the *s/a* chooses one of this group to set up the one-on-one method that he uses in attacking procrastination (68: *ecce*; 70: *te*; 71: *sectabere*; 72: *curras*). It is worth noting that Cornutus has by now disappeared entirely from the satire.

As Persius turns to discuss true freedom—presumably because this is an important example of the kind of thing people should learn about—he begins with a brief general statement of the need for it (73) and goes on from there to talk about misconceptions that people have (73–90). This passage is largely in the third person, but there are hints at an *s/a*-recipient relationship in two of the verbs (79 f.: *recusas . . . tu*; . . . *palles*) and in the Stoic who speaks to an unnamed associate (85: *colligis*; 87: *tolle*). Lines 64–90 not only further the argument of the satire, but they also serve as an effective buffer between the address to a friend (19–64) and the long passage in which the *s/a* speaks to his recipient about freedom (91–191). We have already noticed this kind of buffer in Satire 2 and we will find it again in the sixth satire.

At this point the satire moves to the one-on-one method, and this fills the last one-hundred lines of the poem. Within the overall *s/a*-recipient arrangement there are a number of variations on the theme. For the first

¹⁶ There is no way of proving conclusively that Cornutus is the speaker in these lines. K. Reckford, "Studies in Persius," *Hermes* 90 (1962), 498; C. Dessen, *Iunctura callidus acri: A Study of Persius' Satires*, *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, 59 (Urbana, Illinois, 1968), p. 72; and D. Bo (above, note 14), p. 82, all identify the speaker as Cornutus, while C. Witke, *Latin Satire: The Structure of Persuasion* (Leiden, 1970), pp. 89 f., argues against this idea, describing the passage as "the poet's device for putting words of criticism in the reader's mouth, and for setting forth self-criticism." M. Coffey, *Roman Satire* (London, 1976), p. 106, calls this person simply an "interrupter."

forty lines the *s/a* speaks directly to his second person recipient (91–131). Then, still speaking to him, he replaces himself first with *Avaritia* (132–140), and then with *Luxuria* (141–153), each of whom addresses the recipient from her own point of view. In the next few lines the *s/a* speaks directly to the recipient again (154–160) and after this introduces a scene from comedy to illustrate the process of achieving true freedom (161–175). We should remember that the *s/a* and recipient are still present, but they have been replaced “on stage” by Davus and Chaerestratus, respectively. Finally the *s/a* reappears speaking directly to the recipient as he provides him with more negative examples (176–191). As we look back over the satire, we see that the real subject of the poem is treated in much the same way as it had been in Satires 2, 3, and 4: specific example(s) (73–90), discussion of the problem (91–160), a solution (161–175), with the satiric ending reminding us of Satire 3.

SATIRE SIX

<i>Lines</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Subject</i>
1–11	address to a friend	Bassus and Persius away from Rome
12–24	<i>s/a</i> (Persius)	proper attitude to wealth: example
25–40	<i>s/a</i> to recip. (legator)	improper attitude to wealth: solution, example
41–80	<i>s/a</i> to recip. (heir)	attitude to wealth: problem

The sixth satire is more straightforward than 5 but, like it, it shows peculiarities of method not noted before. It begins, as Satire 2 does, with an address to a friend, in this case Caesius Bassus (1–11). But after the first five and one-half lines Bassus disappears, much as Macrinus did in 2 and Cornutus in 5, and Persius concentrates our attention on himself. These eleven lines show a neat balance, with Bassus the subject in the first half and Persius in the second half.

In the next section (12–24) Persius is on his way to becoming the *s/a* as he informs us that he is satisfied with his lot in life. Here the *s/a* is an example once again of the proper outlook, as he is in Satires 2, 4, 5, and also 1.

Once again, in these lines the satirist has inserted what appears to be a buffer passage between the address to the friend and the *s/a*-recipient device that fills the rest of the poem. We have noticed such buffers in Satires 2 and 5 in essentially the same position.

Persius' hope that he may use his wealth properly (22–24) leads to the

point of the satire, which he expresses in the next two lines to begin the second section: "Live right up to your own crop and grind out your granaries" (25 f.). This is the beginning of the familiar one-on-one relationship that goes through to the end of the satire. It is fairly straightforward, except that the recipient is first the person who, like the *s/a*, has the money and so is a potential legator (25–40), and then he is the legatee or heir who is looking forward to inheriting the money (41–80).

The discussion in each case is fairly straightforward, but we should notice the loose dialogue that appears from time to time, especially when the heir is being addressed (esp. 51–74). The questions the heir asks and the observations he makes are typical of his selfish, self-centered outlook, and we soon realize that he is really a straw man created by the *s/a* for his own purposes.

The overall organization of this satire is a little different from that of the other four which we have examined. The address to the legator includes a specific example (27–33), which thus prefaces the discussion of the problem as it did in the other poems. But the solution, which is in the imperative and so resembles that at the end of 4, precedes the discussion here rather than following it (25 f.). It is repeated a little later, once again in the imperative, in the context of the example (31 f.: . . . *de caespite vivo | frange aliquid, largire inopi, . . .*).

SATIRE ONE

This poem does not really need a prefacing outline, since its structure is for our purposes fairly simple. It begins with an emotional but completely impersonal statement that is programmatic for Persius' satires (1), and the rest of the poem consists of the *s/a* speaking to an unnamed recipient. This device is signalled in the second line with a question from the *s/a* (*min tu istud ais?*), which at the same time warns us to look for dialogue between these two. But this question and the line as a whole indicate something else. The recipient speaks first in reaction to the programmatic statement (2: *quis leget haec?*), thus indicating that he has taken the initiative. This does not happen elsewhere in the satires, but ultimately it does not make a great deal of difference, since the *s/a* remains in control here as everywhere else. It is a dramatic element, however, that sets this satire off from the others, and at the same time contributes to its liveliness.

The one-on-one device which runs through the satire is firmly established in the first seven lines, not only by the question of the *s/a* that has

already been mentioned, but also by the advice which caps this passage. Here, one cannot miss the three second person exhortations (6: *accedas*; 7: *castiges, quaesiveris*) and the second person pronoun (7: *te*). The point has already been made that this last sentence is to be taken as a programmatic statement of Persius' interest in the individual, and it also seems likely that here, at the beginning of his programmatic satire, Persius is drawing our attention to the diatribe method of *s/a*-recipient that he will employ consistently throughout the satires.

In these first seven lines, too, a dialogue seems to be carefully developed reinforcing the one-to-one relationship. But as the poem progresses, this dialogue becomes very loose and hazy, as words are attributed to the recipient rather than coming directly from him (40, 55, 112). Moreover, it is not clear whether some statements are to be taken as belonging to the recipient or the *s/a* (63–68, 76–78, 92–97, 99–102). This is as Persius wants it, and he tells us so. For when the *s/a* points to the fact that he has made up his adversary (44), he is in essence saying that he has made up his part of the dialogue, too. The recipient, then, is a straw man serving much the same function as the heir in Satire 6.

No matter how vague it becomes, the dialogue element does help to establish the association of *s/a* and recipient and carry the illusion through those parts of the poem where the relationship itself becomes hazy. If we choose only those passages in which the recipient is clearly addressed or is undoubtedly speaking, we discover an alternating pattern: lines 1–7, 15–30, 40–57, 79–91, 107–114, 120–125. This is quite different from anything else we have seen. In this version of the *s/a*-recipient device the recipient keeps fading and returning. When he fades the first time (8–14), the *s/a* uses a collective “we” to generalize about Rome (9: *nostrum*; 10: *facimus*; 11: *sapimus*; 13: *scribimus*), but he keeps the recipient in sight with *ignoscite* (11), and by having him “recite” the kind of thing the *s/a* has been talking about in these lines (15–17: *haec . . . leges*). As the recipient fades again a few lines later (30–40), the *s/a* keeps him in the dramatic picture by prefacing *ecce* to the third person examples (30), as we have seen him do elsewhere. In the next passage where the recipient seems not to be present (58–78), the *s/a* begins by addressing a new plural recipient (61–68) and then suddenly draws attention to the presence of the singular recipient with *ecce* strategically located at the approximate center of the scene (69). There is no such sign-post in the next passage (92–106), but the recipient's comment immediately following it (107–110) shows that he has been present and has heard it.¹⁷ The next passage where

¹⁷ Most editors see dialogue here: 92–97 = recip.; 98 = *s/a*; 99–102 = recip.; 103–106 = *s/a*. But Persius leaves things vague, probably on purpose.

the recipient is at least blurred (114–120) is actually a direct answer to the query put forward by the adversary a few lines earlier (107 f.) and so presupposes his presence. The recipient does not appear in the final lines of the satire (126–134), but the dramatic momentum and the fact that the s/a has returned to the issue that he and the recipient were discussing at the beginning of this poem allow us to presuppose the latter's presence.

Indiana University