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ROMAE RUS OPTAS
Saturnus and Saturnalia *in Horace's* Sermones II 3 and II 7*

Dunstan Lowe
(University of Kent, Canterbury)

1. *Introduction*

Horace's engagement with the *Saturnalia* theme is typical of his ambivalent approach to free speech. As this volume richly demonstrates, the *Saturnalia* has affinities with humorous discourse at Rome in general, and with satire in particular. The presence of two Saturnalian poems in Horace's second book of *Sermones*, published around 30 BC, makes the December festival a dominant theme for his collection. There are several reasons to see this as perfectly natural. The festival was both highly traditional and very popular, and did not (so far as we know) have any politically dangerous associations. The figure of Saturnus had a positive reputation but very little actual cult[1], and among other things, embodied the primaeval farm–labourer *virtus* beloved of Horace and all Roman moralists. The *Saturnalia* was also of course the time for humorous discourse, including mockery: in Book I, Horace had established his character as a likeable moralist speaking with comparative freedom from comparatively humble status (*libertino patre natus*, I 6, 6). Horace's personal satiric voice is therefore compatible with the conditions of the Saturnalian holiday, when ordinary restrictions are (within limits) playfully reversed. Under the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, many scholars have interpreted *Sermones* II as carnivalesque, linking it with festivity, foolishness, and freedom[2]. Horace's recurrent satiric targets include food, ambition, and

* I am very grateful to the press' anonymous reviewer for their erudite and judicious comments.

[1] H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion.* Volume 2. *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1993, pp. 137-138.

[2] The link between *Saturnalia* and more extravagant mediaeval carnivals began with M. Bakhtin, transl. Hélène Iswolsky, *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by H. Iswolsky, Bloomington 1984, p. 189. See S.J. Sharland, *Saturnalian Satire: Proto-Carnivalesque Reversals and Inversions in Horace* Satire *2.7*, «Act. Class. (Cape Town)» 48 (2005), pp. 103-120, esp. p. 107: «The argument could be made that the second book of *Satires* in general portrays "a world turned upside down", in that […] many of the textual roles of the first book are reversed in Book 2.» On satire and *Saturnalia*, see M.A. Bernstein, O totiens servus*:* Saturnalia *and Servitude in Augustan Rome*, «Crit. Inq.» 13 (1987), pp 450-474. On *Sermones* II in general, see F. Muecke (ed.), Horace. *Satires II*, Warminster 1993; E. Gowers, *The Restless Companion.* Horace, *Satires 1 and 2* in K. Freudenburg (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 48-61.

pretentiousness, Book II even ends with an absurd dinner party where the host is humiliated, combining feasting with mockery[3]. In short, Horatian satire would be a natural showcase for Saturnus and his festival in the Roman textual imagination. So this line of thinking leads to a much more interesting question: if the affinities between satire and *Saturnalia* seem so automatic, then why is *Sermones* Book II not "more*"* Saturnalian? Why is Horace not celebrating it, and in particular, where is Saturnus? In what follows I will argue that Horace's *Saturnalia* is too ironized to be truly carnivalesque, and that Saturnus was needed somewhere else: to serve a new and decidedly un-satirical purpose for Horace's friend Virgil.

This interpretation of Horace's *Saturnalia* – as contingent on generic constraints and historical realities – contributes to this issue's broader insights into the *Saturnalia*. It would be misleading to characterize the *Saturnalia* "in literature" as a total reversal of normal social relations or a total release of inhibitions, because that would require ignoring its differences from carnivals in other cultures, and exaggerating the known customs (such as legalized gambling, or owners serving food and drink to their household slaves) into symbols of a total inversion of society. When viewing the *Saturnalia* through the writings of elite intellectuals, we must recognize it as a textual construct within a social construct, and remember that such authors' "celebration" of the festival was atypical even in real life. One sign of this is when Roman authors say they distance themselves from the festivities. Another, perhaps greater sign is when they associate the *Saturnalia* with philosophical thought (Horace provides an obvious example of this in Damasippus' Stoic lesson from his teacher Stertinius). In short, as seen through the lens of Latin literature, the *Saturnalia* is an intellectual rather than anthropological phenomenon.

Although there is no direct etymological link[4], the festival of the *Saturnalia* has obvious affinities with the genre of *satura* as defined by the model of Lucilius, which Horace self-consciously modifies. Both of them are Roman cultural practices, indirectly adapting Greek ones, that continued at Rome throughout its growth, first as a metropolis and then as an imperial capital[5]. *Saturnalia* and *satura* share three central concerns: food, playful humour, and frankness of speech (*libertas*, equivalent to the Greek ideal of *parrhesia*[6]). The two may be connected without as-

[3] On *sat*. II 8, see D. Berg, *The Mystery Gourmet of Horace's* Satires *2*, «Class. Journ.» 91/2 (1995-1996), pp. 141-151; R.J. Baker, *Maecenas and Horace* Satires *II.8*, «Class. Journ.» 83/3 (1988), pp. 212-232; D. Lowe, *Burnt Offerings and Harpies at Nasidienus' Dinner-Party (Horace,* Satires *2, 8)*, in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XV*, Bruxelles 2010, pp. 240-257; S.J. Sharland, *Ghostly Guests and Venomous Snakes. Traces of Civil War in Horace,* Satires *2.8*, «Act. Class. (Cape Town)» 54 (2011), pp. 79-100.

[4] Of course, *satura* and *Saturnalia* would readily be connected by the Romans' own naïve style of etymology.

[5] On the history of the *Saturnalia*, which has elements of the Greek summer festival of the Kronia, see J. Albrecht, *Saturnus, seine Gestalt in Sage und Kult*, Halle 1943. On *satura*, which has elements of Greek Old Comedy and iambus, see G.L. Hendrickson, Satura Tota Nostra Est, «Class. Philol.» 22/1 (1927), pp. 46-60; K. Freudenburg, *Satires of Rome. Threatening Poses from Lucilius to Juvenal*, Cambridge-New York 2001; S.J. Sharland, *Horace in Dialogue. Bakhtinian Readings in the* Satires, Bern 2010; J.L. Ferriss-Hill, *Roman Satire and the Old Comic Tradition*, Cambridge-New York 2015.

[6] On Horace and *parrhesia*, see A.K. Michels, Παρρησία *and the Satire of Horace*, «Class.

sociating either one with Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the joyful inversion of the social order, the "carnivalesque", though it might plausibly be applied to both. Arguably frankness of communication *in writing* is the most fundamental connection, since playful compositions were a Saturnalian custom. In various Latin satiric writings we find evocations of festive *libertas*, in ways that are similar but not identical with Greek humorous models like Aristophanes or Menippus. Seneca turns the December festival into a farcical utopia in his *Apocolocyntosis*, a Menippean satire most likely composed for the occasion of the *Saturnalia* itself. Even Juvenal at the start of *Satire* VI, despite the strong moralizing tone, portrays Saturn's reign as a virtuous but unstylish age of strong babies, hairy wives, and acorn-belching husbands. This is a farcical utopia of another kind, where the people are as foolish and naïve as Claudius, despite embodying the exact opposite values[7]. Martial writes Saturnalian gift-tags in his *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, and even claims an explicitly Saturnalian spirit for his poems near the start of his Book XI[8]. Ovid wrote a tongue-in-cheek treatise on cosmetics that, although incomplete, seems exactly the kind of composition some wrote at the *Saturnalia*. In fact, Ovid says exactly this in the *Tristia*, by including «the art of reddening the complexion» in a list of topics that people write poems about «in the smoky month of December»: this also includes dinner-parties, gambling games, and wine-jar manufacture[9]. One recreational activity for intellectuals was the improvisation of polymetric verses, as described in Catullus *carm.* 50, which Francesco Cannizzaro, quoting Alessandro Fo, has called a «jam session»[10] . Seneca's Menippean composition is of course polymetric too, mixing parodies of epic and tragic meters into prose. Catullus is describing just an ordinary night that he found memorable, but there is both writing and wine involved, and we might find this same symposiastic spirit in Lucilius' polymetric *saturae*, which Horace imagines Lucilius writing in relaxed company while dinner was cooking (*sat.* II 1, 71-74). We find Roman authors regularly associating the casual, often improvised nature of the poetry with convivial settings in general and especially the *Saturnalia*. Lucilius, Catullus and Seneca play with multiple meters, Martial writes epigrams, and even Ovid and Horace use hexameters to make the reader smile. To use clothing as a metaphor for genre: we may think of weighty epic, tragedy, or annalistic history, which all involve matters such as patriotism and virtue, painful emotion, and lessons from the deeds of great men, as magnificent old uniforms. By contrast, the genres we have found linked with parties and the *Saturnalia* are the ones dressed in street clothes: *epigrammata*, *Menippea*, *satura*, *nugae*. These comfortable spaces in the bookshelf correspond to December's comfortable space in the calendar,

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Philol.» 39/3 (1944), pp. 173-177; R.L. Hunter, *Horace on Friendship and Free Speech. Epistles 1.18 and Satires 1.4*, «Hermes» 113 (1985), pp. 480-490. On food and Roman humorous discourse, see E. Gowers, *The Loaded Table. Representations of food in Roman literature*, Oxford 1993.

[7] Iuv. VI 1-13, cf. XII 38-41.

[8] *Clamant ecce mei "Io Saturnalia!" versus* (Mart. XI 2, 4).

[9] *Trist.* II 471-496 (487 *fucandi cura coloris*; 491 *talia luduntur fumoso mense Decembri*).

[10] Cf. B. Del Giovane and F. Cannizzaro's introduction in this issue (Io Saturnalia. *Per un'introduzione alla festa romana di dicembre*, p. 24).

when even the elites mostly abandoned the toga for the casual *synthesis*. For all these reasons it should be no surprise that Horace sets two of his satires during the *Saturnalia*, especially since the first poem of Book II is largely about Lucilius, who is pictured with his powerful friends as dinner guests, «joking around with him in their loose clothes» (*nugari cum illo et discincti ludere*, II 1, 73).

2. *Saturnus in and out of the* Saturnalia

We can go further and say that Horace, the fabulist of the town mouse and the country mouse who portrays himself as living a simple life, should naturally welcome the idea of Saturnus himself returning as a figurehead of Rome's rustic past. The king of old Italy, a legendary crop-sower (*sator*), would fit well into the eternal dynamic of city versus country in Roman moralist discourse[11] . Horace enters into that discourse repeatedly, not least in *Satire* I 9 when he speaks the part of a crude figwood statue of Priapus. Saturnus was partly identified with Kronos, who was honoured with the Greek festival of the Kronia, and the comparison helps to clarify the distinctiveness of his cult and character at Rome[12]. Saturnus was certainly considered a relic of the very oldest religious practices in Italy. He may be the Etruscan "Satre" named on the Piacenza Liver[13]. Even the fact that Saturnus' cult at Rome was practiced in *Graecus ritus* was attributed by antiquarians to the "Pelasgians", imagined as the very earliest proto-Greeks[14]. Saturnus seems to have been a symbol of a past agricultural paradise for Ennius[15], and this kind of idealism implies that the *Saturnalia* itself was a nostalgic holiday, time-travelling temporarily back to a Golden Age[16]. As we shall see, idealism was more at home in some Roman literary genres than others.

Since Horace is necessarily a moralist (or at the very least, presents moralist voices) in his satires, Saturnus could fit well into a homespun version of Saturnalian festivity. As a benevolent ruler of a farming community with the most authentic

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[11] T. Ricchieri's article in this issue (Saturnalia institutus festus dies. *I Saturnali in Livio: cronologia, rituali, testo*, pp. 26-45) gathers the references: Livy describes the archaic *Saturnalia* as founded in 497 BC (II 21, 1), and as reformed during Hannibal's invasion, perhaps remodelled on the Kronia (XXII 1, 19-20).

[12] See C.O. Thulin, *Saturnus*, *RE* II 3 (1921), col. 218. Perhaps the identification arose through iconography: Kronos' accessory, the sickle with which he castrated Ouranos, is an agricultural tool.

[13] Martianus Capella puts Saturnus in a similar place on the liver. See H.S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies*, cit., p.138 (esp. note 10); p. 145.

[14] The Pelasgians were said to have established *Graecus ritus* for Saturnus at Rome, just before doing the same for Hercules at the Ara Maxima: Macr. *Sat*. I 8, 1-2 (compare Plut. *Non pos. suav. viv. sec. Epic*. 1098b-c; Macr. *Sat*. I 7, 36-37 = Acc. *ann.* fr. 3 Bl.; Ath. XIV 45, 639d-e = *FrGHist* 268 F 5).

[15] This is the implication of Enn. *ann.* 21-24, at least on Skutsch's interpretation. The fragments include mention of a land where the ancient Latins lived, and the phrase *Saturnia tellus* (fr. 21).

[16] The earliest source that directly equates the festival of Kronos/Saturnus with the return of his Golden Age is Lucian, *Saturnalia* 7. Since both pseudo-Acro on Hor. *sat.* II 7, 4 and Macr. *Sat*. II 7, 26 date to the fifth century, they only show the idea to be widespread in late antiquity. But if Justinus is reliable in ascribing it to Pompeius Trogus (XLIII 1, 3-4), then it is already attested in the first century BC.

Italian credentials, he would be a perfect antidote to the rowdy excesses of the modern-day urban *Saturnalia*. Like his fellow letter-writers Seneca and Pliny would later do, Horace seeks to escape this noise in *sat.* II 3, just as he ultimately flees from the pretentious dinner-party of poem II 8. Poem II 3 could have been framed as a *Saturnalia* outside the social distortions of the metropolis, and therefore purer and more genuinely carnivalesque in spirit – if Horace were not just as scornful of the rustic as of the urban, and making the poem a criticism of its own main narrator.

Saturnus was even associated with poetry, having given his name (by whatever means) to the *versus Saturnius*, the Neanderthal of Latin verse that was later subsumed and eclipsed by the hexameter[17]. We might compare him to other legendary sages of the Italian land, such as the Etruscan prophet and divination instructor Tages, who was allegedly ploughed up out of the soil itself. Or indeed the mysterious Faunus, who gave his prophecies in *versus Saturnii* from deep inside Italy's ancient forests, and who is said to be the grandson of Saturnus himself. His festival, only celebrated in the countryside, was very close in date to the *Saturnalia* (the December 5th *Faunalia Rustica*).

All of these factors should prime us to find Saturnus all over Horace's second Book of *Sermones*. Like Book I, it presents lots of contrasts between town and country, in which the country usually comes out looking better: the best known is the allegory of the mice in II 6. The country mouse prefers peace and simple plenty to the dangerous luxuries of the town mouse. As a rule, Roman moralists are ideologically more at home in the *villa* than the *domus*. So why is Saturnus entirely absent from the Saturnalian *Sermones* II?

Horace's *satura* is very much a product of the Augustan age, a reform of the genre which (as he argues) was no longer viable in its effusive Lucilian incarnation. Horace's comments that Lucilius should have self-edited more may not be purely stylistic in meaning (*sat.* I 4, 8-13, I 10, 50-51). I suggest that the very choice to write *satura* purely in hexameters is a political statement, especially from a poet whom we know was proficient in multiple metres[18]. In the first book, Horace displays his own voice and aesthetics and defends them against supporters of Lucilius: the debate appears again at the start of Book II. Horace also takes a very un-Lucilian stance: as a socially peripheral individual, he cannot be outspoken, and debases himself by continual self-deprecation. It is tempting to connect this with

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[17] Horace calls the Saturnian metre *horridus* (*epist*. II 1, 157), an adjective often applied to Ennius himself. Terentianus calls it a *rudem sonum* (6, p. 400. 2507 K.). On the reason for the name "Saturnian", see R.E.A. Palmer, *Roman Religion and Roman Empire. Five Essays*, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 173-185.

[18] Before Horace, the genre of *satura* was (at least in part) defined formally as a metrical *"macedonia"*. Ennius, Pacuvius, and Lucilius all used various metres including hexameter. On Saturnus and Saturnian metre, see R.E.A. Palmer, *Roman Religion*, cit., pp. 173-185; on Pacuvius' satires, see E. Flintoff, *The Satires of Marcus Pacuvius*, «Latomus» 49/3 (1990), pp. 575-590. However, by the time Lucilius was finished with it, *satura* also had an established repertoire of styles and themes. This is what Horace imitates from Lucilius while restricting himself to the metre of epic, or rather, of didactic poetry. Among other authors he claims to imitate are Bion, Aristophanes, and other Greek humorists, none of whom wrote in hexameter.

satire's "levelling" function as Saturnalian literature, but in fact it is a strong theme in the *Epodes* too. We can almost say that Book II is Saturnalian despite Horace, not because of him: Horace signals political muteness, as I 5 shows[19]. His earliest and most polemic stance as "the Bionic man", the moralist of the diatribes I 1-3, is designed to make him look a hypocrite, an upstart, and a parasite[20]. This self-belittlement meets the profile of the degraded authority in Lucilius and in Saturnalian custom, while protecting the author from charges of genuinely forgetting his place. Still, Horace manages at the same time to advertise his intimacy with Maecenas, and assert this as his real form of authority.

Book II of Horace's *Satires* was produced in the uncertain period around Actium, and its differences to Book I are, in part, a response to the new anxiety of how to behave under Augustus' new control. The inversion of satirist and audience-figure is an extreme consequence of Horace's "levelling" mission – he now resigns yet another form of status, that of the sometimes-moralist speaking persona in *Sermones* I, and mocks the tactics of that persona. Indeed, Book II is in some ways a disavowal of Book I – the new emphasis on food seems to challenge the restrictions of taste and decorum which tied in with the first book's Callimachean message of moderation[21]. Food is the new context of the issues of "correct lifestyle" central to satire[22], and more importantly, an apt metaphor for the poetics of satire itself[23]. But food (*qua* satire) is never celebrated: its enjoyment is always a problem. The same is true of festivity itself, despite the special rules established for the Saturnalian poems (and Book II more broadly) for those seeking to find carnivalesque inversion.

I propose two explanations for why Saturnius is absent from his own festival in *Sermones* II.

One is that this is not truly a safe space, meaning that it can never be a true *Saturnalia*. Gowers, Oliensis, Plaza, Freudenburg, and others have shown how carefully Horace shapes his persona, and keeps shaping it, from the preacher of *Sermones* I 1-3 onward[24]. After Book I, we are familiar with Horace's deft strategies for serving up diatribe and mockery from below, instead of tipping it down from above like Lucilius. The seasoning is very palatable, and the hands that serve are very visible. Horace has made humility and modesty part of his satiric style – these are "Chats" (*Sermones*), and any aggression may be excused as either playful or a pretence. Even within Horace's satiric corpus, he moves progressively further away

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[19] K. Freudenburg, *Satires*, cit., p. 52.

[20] W. Turpin, *The Epicurean Parasite. Horace,* Satires *1. 1-3*, «Ramus» 27/2 (1998), pp. 127-140; K. Freudenburg, *Satires*, cit., p. 22.

[21] *panis ematur, holus, vini sextarius* (Hor. *sat*. I 1, 74); *holus ac far* (I 6, 112)*; inde domum me / ad porri et ciceris refero laganique catinum* (I 10, 114-15).

[22] D. Berg, *The Mystery*, cit.

[23] E. Gowers, *Loaded*, cit., p. 160.

[24] On Horace's carefully crafted satiric persona, see E. Gowers, *The Restless Companion*, cit.; E. Oliensis, *Horace and the Rhetoric of Authority*, Cambridge-New York 1998; M. Plaza, *The Function of Humour in Roman Verse Satire. Laughing and Lying*, Oxford-New York 2006; K. Freudenburg, *Satires*, cit.

from Lucilian diatribe, obscenity, politics, and outspokenness of any kind. In the second book of *Sermones*, this road takes Horace almost entirely out of view.

Another feature of Horaces's Saturnalian poems that seems to be inconsistent with the festive spirit is the theme of philosophy: one obvious connection between II 3 and II 7 is that both Damasippus and Davus are evangelical converts to Stoicism. Horace's version of the *Saturnalia* is riddled with bad philosophy; it is like a Superman carrying the kryptonite of Stoicism around his neck. Horace is still in the business of mocking Stoics, as he did in I 3, but disagreeable philosophical views are not the kind of problem the *Saturnalia* ought to have. Damasippus is preaching at second-hand with the zeal of the convert, and although evidently a target of mockery, he has attracted discussion over what kind of a target he is[25]. According to Plaza, *sat.* II 3 achieves two aims at once: first, the Saturnalian joy of «laughing at the main preacher»; second, the moral lesson that ridiculous-sounding people can deserve to be heard seriously[26] . I would dispute that this poem satisfies us either way. As an excessively long poem, it could also be interpreted as the worst-case scenario of what happens at a rural *Saturnalia* when the Saturnian Golden Age is lost.

On this view, the adoption of the *Saturnalia* as setting in II 3 and II 7 is connected with the other big change for Book II: its much heavier use of dialogue. This leaves Horace's persona (his "satiric ego") in a passive and frequently obscured position, in very strong contrast with the preaching, Bion-like voice in which he orates the first three poems of Book I. In Book II, other characters take the stance of moralizing satirist, while Horace himself becomes an audience-figure, and this is especially obvious in the two poems with a Saturnalian setting. In poem II 3, Horace is subjected to Damasippus' long Stoic diatribe, which for the most part he endures with an apparent patience that readers are bound to find ironic: the last time he fell victim to a tedious talker, in the ninth poem of Book I, they were certainly meant to laugh at Horace's discomfort and frustration. The situation is rather different in the later Saturnalian poem, II 7, in which Horace's own slave Davus gives a much shorter and more impudent attack based on another Stoic paradox[27]. Horace is far less tolerant of this, and asserts his authority over the insubordinate but undeniably inferior *servus callidus*. The two poems are very revealing of how Horace regards himself and his aims as satirist, and how these things have changed since Book I. In particular, the taunts uttered by Davus point out exactly what Horace is *not* doing in the poem, namely entering into his own allegedly ideal world: at Rome he praises the countryside (*Romae rus optas*, II 7, 28) and *vice versa*. The most interesting

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[25] On Horace's Damasippus, see K. Verboven, *Damasippus, the Story of a Businessman?*, in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History VIII*, Bruxelles 1997, pp. 195-217; R.P. Bond, *Horace on Damasippus on Stertinius on...*, «Scholia» 7 (1998), pp. 82-108; S.J. Sharland, *Soporific Satire. Horace, Damasippus and Professor Snore (Stertinius) in* Satire *2.3*, «Act. Class. (Cape Town)» 52 (2009), pp. 113-131.

[26] M. Plaza, *The Function*, cit., p. 201.

[27] On *sat*. II 7, see H.B. Evans, *Horace,* Satires *2.7: Saturnalia and Satire*, «Class. Journ.» 73 (1978), pp. 307-312.

criticism involves a hypothetical god taking Horace back in time to the good old days (vv. 22-27):

laudas
fortunam et mores antiquae plebis, et idem,
siquis ad illa deus subito te agat, usque recuses,
aut quia non sentis, quod clamas, rectius esse,
aut quia non firmus rectum defendis et haeres
nequiquam caeno cupiens evellere plantam.

«You praise
The situation and the customs of the people of old,
and if some god suddenly took you there, you'd always refuse,
either because you don't think what you praise was really better,
or because you don't firmly defend what's right
and you stick in the mud, trying helplessly to pull your foot out».

This god (*siquis* […] *deus*) recalls the one deployed by Horace himself in *sat.* I 1, 12 (*siquis deus*), but more to the point, it transports Horace suddenly back to his idealized past, which he refuses. This is the closest thing to a genuine Golden Age, and the *deus* is a ghost of Saturnus himself. Horace would turn down the opportunity to go there, just as he does in a different sense in Book II as a whole. Davus speaks for most of the poem, but the endpoint of the limitations on Horace is at the end of II 7, when the author finally breaks in and interrupts his own character as if reasserting control of his own text[28]. According to Plaza, this poem is hard to interpret because of its incongruities: her solution is that the poem problematizes satire itself. Oliensis's more persuasive view is that Book II is a meta-satire, mocking Horace's own satirist persona from Book I[29]. Davus plays the surrogate Book I Horace to the Book II Horace, and in the end, he is told «that's enough, be quiet»[30]. This does not seem very Saturnalian, but it was also the very first thing that happened in Book II. Poem 1 begins with Trebatius giving Horace almost the same instruction (1-6):

"Sunt quibus in satura videar nimis acer et ultra
legem tendere opus; sine nervis altera quidquid
conposui pars esse putat similisque meorum
mille die versus deduci posse. Trebati,
quid faciam? praescribe". "quiescas". "ne faciam, inquis,
omnino versus?" "aio".

[28] The poem is well discussed by M. Plaza, *The Function*, cit., pp. 214-221.

[29] M. Plaza, *The Function*, cit., p. 215; E. Oliensis, *Horace*, cit. The meta-satire interpretation is supported by the fact that Davus rounds up all the faults attacked by Horace in poems 1, 2, 3, and 6 of Book I – as well as gluttony from poem II 2: N. Rudd, *The Satires of Horace: A study*, Cambridge 1966, p. 194.

[30] Tiresias told Odysseus that, to make his way in Rome, he had to «be the Davus from comedy» (*Davus sis comicus*, II 5, 91). Compare Davus' own accusation to Horace: *O totiens servus* (II 7, 70).

«“There are people who say that I seem too harsh in my satire,
And take the project too far; others think I am writing non-satire,
Without any muscle, and that a thousand verses like mine
Could be written in one day. Trebatius, what should I do? Tell me.”
“Be quiet”.
“Are you saying I shouldn’t write poetry at all?”
“Yep”».

From this moment onward, in a wide range of ways and especially in the two Saturnalian poems, Horace performs an ironic form of self-expression, in which he either speaks under protest, or does not speak at all. The social freedom and pleasure of the *Saturnalia* is only sustainable for the few whose privilege gives them a truly Golden Age lifestyle[31]. As Statius shows more directly in a negotiation of the social politics of gift-exchange (*silv*. 4, 9)[32] , the *Saturnalia* is not in reality a Golden Age of equality or inversion, and in this one respect alone Horace reflects the historical truth. He ironizes the December festival itself, just like everything else, in service to his subtle agenda of self-representation.

3. *Horace and Virgil in Dialogue*

I suggest that the explanation for Horace’s strangely un-festive and Saturnus-free version of the *Saturnalia* in *Sermones* II lies in his compositional relationship with his poet-colleague, Virgil. The problem was that, all of a sudden, the ancient Roman figure of Saturnus was “too” relevant to be available for association with Saturnalian festivity and therefore with satire – even for Horace when he chooses the *Saturnalia* as a setting for his own dialogues. Saturnus was already beginning to play a role in Virgil’s very different and more serious poetic Rome. The two writers were close friends as well as poetic peers[33]. It is easy to demonstrate that they had enough shared interests in their poetic activity, both in content and in method, to be sensitive to one another’s thematic projects. In keeping with the spirit of their time, both were multi-genre poets who created Latin texts as successors to Greek ones and gave them Greek titles; both were influenced by Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets, while responding to earlier Roman poets (Ennius for Virgil, Lucilius for Horace) in their longer works. Importantly, the dates of their publications (so far as we can calculate them) are interwoven: Virgil’s *Eclogues* are datable to 38 BC and Horace’s *Sermones* I in 35 BC: both are collections of ten hexameter poems,

[31] Compare Ganymede in Petron. *sat*. (44, 3), *nam isti maiores maxillae semper Saturnalia agunt*, «For those grand jawbones have a never-ending *Saturnalia*».

[32] J.Mira Seo, *Statius Silvae 4.9 and the Poetics of Saturnalian Exchange*, «Mat. Disc. An. testi Clas.» 61 (2009), pp. 243-256.

[33] On the friendship between the two, see G.E. Duckworth, Animae Dimidium Meae. *Two Poets of Rome*, «Trans. Proc. Am. Philol. Ass.» 87 (1956), pp. 281-316; J.S. Campbell, Animae Dimidium Meae. *Horace’s Tribute to Vergil*, «Class. Journ.» 82/4 (1987), pp. 314-318.

and Horace's contains explicit praise of Virgil's[34]. The *Georgics* might have appeared in 29 BC, and Horace's *Sermones* II and *Epodes* seem to have been published only slightly before that, in 30 BC. We do not know when Virgil began work on the *Aeneid*, only that it was close to completion at his death in 19 BC and was his only known project for the preceding decade. Both mention Octavian and Maecenas as the indirect and direct patrons of their work, and both (circumspectly) engage with the theme of Rome's civil wars. Yet other themes indicate a shared social circle, and even a close personal relationship: both also mention Cleopatra, and attack the otherwise unknown "Maevius", whom Virgil may have invented[35]. We cannot know the nature or extent of Horace and Virgil's social interaction, or indeed what other, now-lost works by mutual friends might have told us about it[36]. But for the question of Saturnus' suitability for Saturnalian literature in the Augustan period – in other words his generic affiliation – we only need to establish whether they took one another's work into account when writing.

We can definitely say that that the two poets knew and responded to one another's work, based on a large number of intertextual signs. Many examples have been noted, and more may yet emerge[37]. In 30 BC, the most probable year that both *Sermones* II and the *Epodes* were published, Virgil was already at work on his much-anticipated epic of Troy and Rome. The *Georgics* already anticipate the *Aeneid*, particularly Book VII, in their portrait of the Italian countryside as a template for an idealized national identity. Virgil undertook to create an idyllic past for Italy, based on the benefits of farming: as hard, happy, virtue-building work, leading to glorious results[38]. He was far from the first to adopt these values, but the ways in which he formulated them were both original and influential, and Saturnus was part of that.

4. *Virgil's Saturnus*

In the *Aeneid*, Saturnus is strictly limited to the serious role of an agricultural god that his name (*sator*, «sower») implies. Virgil presents him as an ancestor of the ancient Italic peoples, emphatically connecting him with what they contribute to Rome's identity: they carry their farming and hunting tools into battle against the Trojans, and then directly into the ancestry of Rome. For Virgil, Saturnus's Golden

[34] *Molle atque facetum / Vergilio adnuerunt gaudentes rure Camenae* (Hor. *sat.* I 10, 44-45).

[35] Cleopatra: Verg. *Aen*. VIII 707-713; Hor. *carm*. I 37; Maevius: Verg. *ecl*. 3, 90; Hor. *epod.* 10.

[36] Horace and Virgil's friendship may have featured in the elegies or satirical epigrams of Virgil's friend Domitius Marsus; the poetry of Horace's friend Messalla Corvinus, or their mutual friend Plotius Tucca (Hor. *sat*. I 5, 30; 10, 81); and indeed the writings of Maecenas himself, especially his prose *Symposium* portraying Horace, Virgil, and Messalla in dialogue.

[37] Various commentators have found instances of intertextuality between the two. For example, C. Hosius (ed.), P. Vergili Maronis *Bucolica. Cum auctoribus et imitatoribus in usum scholarum*, Bonn 1915, lists 52 verbal parallels to the *Eclogues* in Horace, of which five are in *sat.* I, five in *sat.* II, twenty in the Epodes and 22 in the Odes. In one recent contribution, Putnam has proposed a series of verbal and thematic parallels between *carm*. III 27 and *Aen.* IX (M.C.J. Putnam, *Horace C. 3.27 and Virgil, Aeneid 9*, «New Engl. Class. Journ.» 50/2 (2023), pp. 1-8).

[38] See P.A. Johnston, *Vergil's Agricultural Golden Age. A Study of the* Georgics, Leiden 1980.

Age becomes the harsh-primitivist root of the strong Italian *robur*, and this begins in the *Georgics* (II 173-176):

> salue, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,
> magna uirum: tibi res antiquae laudis et artem
> ingredior sanctos ausus recludere fontis,
> Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.
>
> «Hail, great bearer of crops, Saturnian land!
> Great bearer of men! For you, I step forth
> Into the subject, and into the ancient art of praise,
> And sing a Hesiodic song all through Rome's towns».

The poem's Greece-Italy *métissage* is strenuously asserted, even as Italy is being cast as *Saturnia tellus*[39]. Saturnus himself appears at a significant point in the poem: at the climax of Virgil's praise of the rural life, which in turn forms the conclusion of *Georgics* Book II (532-540):

> hanc olim ueteres uitam coluere Sabini,
> hanc Remus et frater; sic fortis Etruria creuit
> scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma,
> septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.
> ante etiam sceptrum Dictaei regis et ante
> impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuuencis,
> aureus hanc uitam in terris Saturnus agebat;
> necdum etiam audierant inflari classica, necdum
> impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis.
>
> «The ancient Sabines once cultivated this lifestyle,
> Remus and his brother too; this is how brave Etruria grew,
> And indeed Rome became the finest of all,
> And surrounded its seven citadels with a single wall.
> Before even the sceptre of the Dictaean King, and before
> An impious race feasted on slaughtered cattle,
> Golden Saturnus led this life upon the Earth;
> Nor yet had anyone heard the blare of war-trumpets, nor yet
> Did swords clang, laid on hard anvils».

In this passage, having identified agriculture with virtue, Virgil declares the earliest era of Italian civilization to be the epitome of both. He concludes by tracing the lifestyle back to the reign of Saturnus, who is indeed called «golden» (*aureus*), which must mean not only "blissful" but the ruler of the Golden Age. Though not directly stated, it is strongly implied that Saturnus ruled Italy and that the later generations of Sabines, Etruscans, and Romans continued his lifestyle. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil takes the same idea much further, embedding Saturnus in Latium's history,

[39] The fusion of Greek and Italian culture finds striking expressions in Horace too, for example the Greek chorus of boys and girls dancing like Salian priests at *carm.* IV 1, 25-28.

and indeed its genealogy (Saturnus-Picus-Faunus-Latinus-Lavinia-Silvius)[40]. This new archetype for "the good old days" epitomizes Italy's pride in its rustic origins by combining two pre-existing styles of the Golden Age. On the one hand is effortless plenty; on the other, making do with little. In this new synthesis, hard work is both necessary and richly rewarded, and the justice of that is embodied in the epithet *Saturnius*. The epithet is a Latin equivalent of *Kronides* and *Kronion*, Homer's frequent epithets for Zeus[41]. Its repeated use for Juno (and Jupiter) in the *Aeneid* may still hint at the kin-murder aspect of Saturnus through his identification with Kronos[42]. But it is also applied to mythical Italy and its people[43]. The identification of Juno as *Saturnia* pre-dates Virgil and may be as much about Roman tradition as Greek mythology[44]. It is important to bear in mind that Saturnus was mainly relevant to Rome and to Virgil as an Italian god rather than as Kronos, at least in this period. For his purposes, the golden Saturnian age had to remain a historic (and so to speak, Hesiodic) aspect of Roman identity, far removed from the modern-day December festival. The Saturnian past helped Virgil to create an ideal portrait of Roman society. Satire can have equally idealistic aims, and creates a portrait of Roman society too – but one that is far from ideal, and firmly rooted in the vices and foolishness of the satirist's own time. It is impossible to say to what extent either Virgil or Horace perceived a political dimension to one another's work, but the boundaries between epos and verse *satura* were very clear. Among Maecenas' coterie of celebrity hexameter-writing friends, the Saturnian Golden Age could not be both noble and playful. As a result, Horace creates his own version of Saturnalian satire that has no mythology, no festivity, and no freedom of speech (or at least none without resistance or criticism).

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[40] See P.A. Johnston, *Vergil's Conception of Saturnus*, «Calif. Stud. Class. Ant.» 10 (1977), pp. 57-70.

[41] Homer does not use such an epithet for Hera, only the more cumbersome formula «daughter of great Kronos» (Ἥρη πρέσβα θεὰ θυγάτηρ μεγάλοιο Κρόνοιο, *Il*. v 721). The similarity of Ennius' *optima caelicolum, Saturnia, magna dearum* (*sed. inc*. fr. 1.4 Skutsch) suggests that the epithet *Saturnia* derives from this.

[42] Juno is *Saturnia* (*Aen*. I 23; III 380; IV 92; V 606; VII 428; VII 560; VII 572; VII 622; IX 2; IX 745; IX 803; X 659; X 760; XII 56; XII 178; XII 807). Virgil also applies the epithet to Jupiter (IV 372, V 799); both siblings are *Saturni* […] *proles* at XII 830. On *Saturnia Iuno*, see C.W. Amerasinghe, 'Saturnia Iuno'. *Its Significance in the* Aeneid, «Gr. Rom.» 22 (1953), pp. 61-69; L.A. MacKay, *Saturnia Iuno*, «Gr. Rom.» 3/1 (1956), pp. 59-60; W.S. Anderson, *Juno and Saturn in the* Aeneid, «Stud. Philol.» 50 (1958), pp. 519-532.

[43] Saturnus is a founder-figure and synonym for Italian identity in the *Aeneid*: I 569-570 (*Seu vos Hesperiam magnam Saturniaque arva, / sive Erycis finis regemque optatis Acesten*); VI 792-794 (*Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet / saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva / Saturno quondam*); VII 48-49 (*Fauno Picus pater, isque parentem / te, Saturne, refert, tu sanguinis ultimus auctor*); 180-181 (*Saturnusque senex Ianique bifrontis imago / vestibulo astabant*); 202-204 (*ne fugite hospitium, neve ignorate Latinos / Saturni gentem haud vinclo nec legibus aequam, / sponte sua veterisque dei se more tenentem*); VIII 319-332 (*primus ab aetherio venit Saturnus Olympo* […] *saepius et nomen posuit Saturnia tellus*); 357-358 (*hanc Ianus pater, hanc Saturnus condidit arcem; / Ianiculum huic, illi fuerat Saturnia nomen*); XI 252-253 (*O fortunatae gentes, Saturnia regna, / antiqui Ausonii*).

[44] According to R.E.A. Palmer, *Roman Religion*, cit., p. 43, the colony of Saturnia founded in 183 was named in honour of Juno.

5. *Conclusions*

As Zanker has observed, Horace avoids talking about either a Golden Age or Saturnus in *Odes* IV and the *Carmen Saeculare*: in other words, in all of his work published after the *Aeneid*[45]. I suggest that the absence of Saturnus from Horace's work should be felt much sooner, in *Sermones* II, for the very same reason: that he was responsive to the work of his friend and fellow-poet, Virgil. As we have seen, already in *Georgics* II Virgil was doing something with the Roman god's name that was incompatible with Saturnalian humour. In *Aeneid* VII, this developed into an ideologically loaded version of a Golden Age in which Saturnus played a part. Horace nevertheless chooses the *Saturnalia* as the setting for two poems in *Sermones* II, and the result is a typically ironized and restrained version of the festival, with no mention of Saturnus or his age, even though some recurrent motifs in these and other poems are compatible with the carnivalesque. Meanwhile, aspects such as the recurrent theme of Stoic preaching, the extended and wearying monologue of II 3, and the final silencing of Davus at the end of II 7, show it to be a constructed and intellectually-oriented phenomenon. Horace seems perfectly happy to shape a satirical *Saturnalia* that does not overlap with Virgil's Saturnian Golden Age: in any case, Horace himself does not enjoy the festive freedom that is supposedly essential to the *Saturnalia.*

Sommario: Il secondo libro delle *Satire* di Orazio (30 a.C.), scritto nel travagliato periodo intorno ad Azio, mostra due grandi differenze rispetto al libro I. In primo luogo, c'è una nuova attenzione per i *Saturnalia*, che costituiscono lo scenario sia della satira II 3 sia della II 7. La festa rappresentava tradizionalmente un momento di giocosa libertà e di autoindulgenza festosa (e aveva affinità con il genere stesso della satira). In secondo luogo, Orazio, nella sua maschera di poeta "umile", si avverte con meno frequenza, e l'originale dispensatore di diatribe ora le riceve da altri personaggi. Possiamo anche notare che Saturno stesso è totalmente assente da questi componimenti. Interpreto la contraddizione tra l'uso che Orazio fa del tema dei *Saturnalia* e la mancanza del discorso sulla *libertas* festiva attraverso il suo stretto rapporto testuale con Virgilio. Il mantovano aveva usato Saturno e l'età dell'oro per scopi seri nelle *Georgiche* (29 a.C.), e lo avrebbe fatto di nuovo in modo più completo nell'*Eneide*. Per questo motivo, i *Saturnalia* non potevano più essere un semplice revival di divertimento e libertà, nemmeno per un satirico. Invece, Orazio rende i *Saturnalia* un'altra occasione per incanalare, deviandola, la sua voce satirica.

Parole chiave: Orazio, *Sermones*, Satira, *Saturnalia*, Saturno, Virgilio, *Eneide.*

Abstract: Horace's second book of *Sermones* (30 BC), written in the troubled period around Actium, shows two big differences from Book I. First, there is a new focus on the *Saturnalia*, which is the setting for both II 3 and II 7. This was traditionally a time for playful freedoms and festive self-indulgences (and had affinities with the genre of *satura* itself). But

[45] A.T. Zanker, *Late Horatian Lyric and the Virgilian Golden Age*, «Am. Journ. Philol.» 131/3 (2010), pp. 495-516.

second, Horace's own humble persona is heard far less, and the original giver of diatribes now receives them from other characters. We can also note that Saturnus himself is totally absent from these poems. I explain the contradiction between Horace's use of the *Saturnalia* theme and his lack of festive *libertas* speech through his close textual relationship with Virgil. The Mantuan used Saturnus and the Golden Age for serious purposes in the *Georgics* (29 BC), and would do it again more fully in the *Aeneid*. For this reason, the *Saturnalia* could no longer be a straightforward revival of fun and freedom, even for a satirist. Instead, Horace makes the *Saturnalia* another way to refract his satiric voice.

Keywords: Horace, *Sermones*, Satire, *Saturnalia*, Saturnus, Virgil, *Aeneid.*