

SATIRIC PLOTTING IN SENECA'S *APOCOLOCYNTOSIS*

This paper studies Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* as Menippean satire. Seneca utilizes playfulness, New Year's celebration, swiftness of pace, and in particular anticlimactic repetition to make very serious fun of an Emperor who had been a cruel absolutist and murderous jugde.

εὐκολον... τὴν εἰς ᾗδου ὁδὸν
καταμύοντας γοῦν ἀπιέναι¹.

*Omnia procliuia sunt, facile descenditur*².

Satire, according to Northrop Frye, encompasses and replicates the imagery of Winter, of nature's demise, of irony —and of the infernal regions³. Hence it is no surprise that satiric plots imitate features of Hell and the Underworld, and these realms are aptly represented by eternal repetition: characters endlessly tormenting one another in Sartre's *No Exit*; Genesis re-enacted (in reverse) at the conclusion of Alexander Pope's uncreating *Dunciad*; characters changing places and/or commencing all over again at the close of Ionesco's *Bald Soprano* or *The Lesson*; *Reynard the Fox* being endlessly deceitful, sly, murderous, rapacious —and as endlessly triumphant. In its purest form, the infernally repetitious plot is perhaps best exemplified by Tantalus, forever athirst yet forever parched, or by Sisyphus, himself forever a Rolling Stone. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

When satire isn't entirely hell-bound, it is hell-bent; irrevocably its plot slips and slithers toward the Underworld —all downhill. In Virgil's words,

¹ «...the road to Hades is easy; men can get there with their eyes closed»: a saying of the Cynic Bion of Borysthenes, in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, IV 7, 49. Our translation.

² «All things slope downward; one easily descends», Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 13. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are our own.

³ *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton 1957, pp. 223-239.

facilis descensus Auerno
(noctis atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis)...⁴,

that Dryden renders as:

The gates of hell are open night and day;
smooth the descent, and easy is the way...⁵.

And almost all satiric plots tumble or bounce gladsomely downwards —toward ineptitude, inertia, or disaster⁶. Hence, in Juvenal III, the last remaining virtuous man is driven out of Rome; the wonderfully insane Quixote recovers his wits only upon his deathbed; Gulliver's one stroke of insight and learning is accompanied by a ravening equine lunacy; Browning's perverse and demented Men & Women remain demented and perverse; Brecht's war-bound businesswoman, Mother Courage, loses her every offspring in the slaughter, and the children in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* are «rescued» from exterminating and scourging one another only to be gently wafted back into the mature, grownup world of atomic holocaust. There is deliberate repetition in satire, and it comprises a kind of vigorously cheerful party-hopping —from one calamity to another.

The present paper wishes to focus upon special aspects of doubling that shape satiric plotting —the use of direct, deliberate, and even malignant repetition. And, of course, such repetition by its very nature is utilized to include disjuncture and humor, but also weariness, anticlimax, and shock. No better example of a plot that satirically repeats itself can be found than in Seneca's satire upon the newly-deceased Emperor Claudius, the *Apocolocyntosis* (A. D. 54).

First, it must be noted that the *Apocolocyntosis* is a pure example (with so little of such works extant)⁷ of Menippean satire —«the only

⁴ *Aeneid* VI 126-127.

⁵ «Aeneis» VI 192-193, *The Poetical Works of Dryden*, ed. George R. Noyes, rev. edn., Boston 1950, p. 596.

⁶ Of special interest on the downward course of satiric plots are Philip Pinkus, «Satire and St. George», *Queen's Quarterly* 70, 1963, pp. 30-49; Alvin Kernan, «The *Dunciad* and the Plot of Satire», *Studies in English Literature* 2, 1962, pp. 255-266; John R. Clark & Anna Motto, *Satire—That Blasted Art*, New York 1973, especially pp. 1-22, 120-122; and Michael Seidel's recent booklength study of «violation», «subversion», and «decay» of narrative and form in fictional satires in *Satiric Inheritance, Rabelais to Sterne*, Princeton 1979.

⁷ Only titles and a few scraps of Menippus of Gadara's Cynic satires survive; the richest body of writings in this kind are to be found in the numerous imitations by Lucian of Samosata (c. 115-c. 200 A. D.). In Latin, only fragments and titles survive of Varro's 150 books of *Saturae Menippeae*. In addition to the *Apocolocyntosis*, we have a brilliant segment of Petronius' *Satyricon*. Later works, by

example of this genre», as Ulrich Knoche observes, «in the Latin language»⁸. Traditionally, Menippean satire⁹, according to the rhetoricians—and in one of the most unhelpful definitions devised—is a mixture of prose and verse. From what we learn about Menippus the Cynic and can observe from some of the imitations of Lucian, he extended the diatribe¹⁰ into a playful bumbling fiction—stuffed with proverbs, tales, bawdy, jokes, asides, digressions, and parodies—that imitated, toyed with, and excoriated human foibles and conduct¹¹. And although such satires constitutionally pose as common, coarse, and «low», they are simultaneously extremely sophisticated parasites, mimicking the clichés and jargon from high and popular culture—the poet's flights, the romancer's naive and blissful glibness, the epic author's grand manner and the sombre, boistrous *tragicus fit* of the theater, as well as the bumpkin's proverbs, the wit's epigrams, the historian's accuracy and solemnity, the lawyer's documentary gobbledygook, the scholar's pomp and annotation. That it bounces back and forth 'twixt verse and prose, between its own variety of styles and those of allusion and quotation, is the least of its divagations. It parades and flaunts and dips and

Apuleius and Boethius, for instance, provide Menippean strategies mixed together with devices from other genres. Pertinent studies of early satire include J. Bompaigne, *Lucien écrivain: imitation et création*, Paris 1958; J. Geffcken, «Studien zur griechischen Satire», *Neue Jahrbücher für das Klassische Altertum* 27, 1911, pp. 393-411, 469-493; and R. Helm, *Lucian und Menipp*, Leipzig 1906.

⁸ Ulrich Knoche, *Roman Satire*, trans. Edwin S. Ramage, Bloomington, Ind., & London 1975, p. 99; see also J. M. K. Martin, «Seneca the Satirist», *Greece & Rome* 14, 1945, p. 65. One of the better introductions to and sound discussions of the *Apocolocyntosis* is still Otto Weinreich's *Senecas Apocolocyntosis. Die Satire auf Tod, Himmel- und Höllenfahrt des Kaisers Claudius. Einführung, Analyse, Untersuchungen, Uebersetzung*, Berlin 1923.

⁹ See esp. Juanita Williams, «Towards a Definition of Menippean Satire», unpub. Ph. D. diss., Vanderbilt Univ. 1966, and Eugene Korkowski, «Menippus and His Imitators; A Conspectus, up to Sterne, for a Misunderstood Genre», unpub. Ph. D. diss., Univ. of California, San Diego 1973.

¹⁰ Consult André Oltramare, *Les Origines de la Diatribe Romaine*, Geneva 1926, and George Converse Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace* [1920], Westport, Conn., 1971, esp. pp. 178-191. The only extensive remains of a Cynic writer, those by Teles, are available in English: consult *Teles (The Cynic Teacher)*, tr. Edward N. O'Neil, Missoula, Montana, 1977.

¹¹ Mary Claire Randolph well describes the Roman verse satirists' adaptation and utilization of these multiple features: «...miniature dramas, sententious proverbs and maxims, compressed beast fables..., brief sermons, sharp debates..., vignettes, swiftly-sketched figure-processions, little fictions and apologues, visions, apostrophes and invocations to abstractions—anything and everything...» («The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire», *Philological Quarterly* 21, 1942, p. 373). Alan Purley Ball, *The Satire of Seneca on The Apotheosis of Claudius*, New York 1902, pp. 58-74, is esp. good in describing «the prevailing looseness» of *satira Menippea*, its abrupt shifts in style, tone, subject and the hops and skips from verse to prose and back that are to be expected.

fumbles helter-skelter from episode to episode, style to style, manner to manner, wreaking havoc, desecrating conventions —and conventional expectations of fixed genre or level of diction. Menippean satire is what you might expect of a philosopher turbulently at play, a mature bad boy romping in literature, and making messes, too. Its bundle of untowardly parts —its false starts, detours, *pasticci*, and disruptions— constitute the essence of what may be termed, à la Kenneth Burke, this genre's «repetitive form»¹².

The occasion for Seneca's particular satire was the Emperor Claudius's demise (secretly, from poisoning, and not mentioned in this satire) on October 13, A. D. 54. He had been only the fourth *princeps* since the demise of the Republic, and nostalgia for lost freedom still predominated. Certainly, Claudius had not been a popular ruler; his quirky disposition, his stammer, his shaky stride, his forgetfulness, his antiquarian studies, his addiction to sitting in judgment of legal cases (and his unpredictable decisions), together with a streak of meanness and gestures toward absolutism, and his partiality to select freedmen and toadies hardly earned him the populace's confidence or devotion. Yet, *pro forma*, following more and more popular Asiatic customs, the Senate had voted almost immediately for his official deification, and temples and cults were duly instated. Augustus, the founder of the Empire, had been so deified before him (as had Tiberius), and it must be confessed that, in contrast to the ravenously mad Caligula whom he succeeded, Claudius appeared tame or at least tolerable. Nonetheless, Claudius' elevation to godhood was looked upon in Rome with snickers and faintly incredulous amusement¹³.

As tutor and advisor to the new seventeen-year-old Emperor Nero, Seneca could hardly resist the opportunity to debunk the sacred rites catapulting the old reprobate to heaven; he certainly must have grasped the chance he had to clean the slate, as it were: to mock at Claudius's dehumanizing qualities —particularly his injustice— to prepare the stage for a «new leaf» in government, and by innuendo to warn the

¹² Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, Chicago 1957, p. 125. Such a form «is the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises». Although Burke recognizes that it is a universal strategy, his reference to Gulliver and to «the sustaining of an attitude, as in satire» suggests that he senses its particular prevalence and appropriateness among picaresque and caustic authors.

¹³ Gilbert Bagnani conjectures that such political squibs must have been «nauseatingly common»; and (with some exaggeration) he suggests «that the death of Claudius probably inspired half the literate population of Rome to write lampoons and pasquinades» («The Date, Purpose, and Authorship of The *Ludus de Morte Claudii*», in *Arbiter of Elegance: A Study of The Life & Works of C. Petronius*, Phoenix, Suppl., vol. II, Toronto 1954, pp. 27-28).

new Emperor against clumsy, autocratic (and scornfully laughable) bad government. Like More or Vives or Erasmus among the humanists, Seneca had the opportunity to devise, by negative example, «The Education of a Roman Prince»¹⁴. Yet, informative as this satiric caper may be, we must be cautious not to hasten to extreme conclusions. The *Apocolocyntosis* is not a meticulous Stoic manual of instructions or a compilation of pious lessons, as some have thought¹⁵. Nor is it, at the opposite extreme, a mere «silly and spiteful» lampoon upon a single individual¹⁶, devoid of social meaning¹⁷ or the least hint of satiric and corrective purpose¹⁸. If it is light and farcical and imaginative, it is nevertheless, in its casual way, a splendidly incisive indictment of mindless tyrannous cruelty and of any political conventions and façades that would sanction bumbling and villainous conduct.

Seneca's very title presents an initial problem. Dio Cassius mentions that Seneca's satire of the dead emperor and his deification is named the *Apocolocyntosis*¹⁹, but none of the extant MSS employs that deliberately mystifying Greekish term; the oldest (Sangallensis 569) designates the work DIVI CLAUDII INCIPIT ΑΠΟΘΕΩΣΙΣ («The Apotheosis

¹⁴ On the humanists' interest in condemning ruthless military leaders and in properly educating princes, consult Robert P. Adams, «Bold Bawdry and Open Manslaughter: The English New Humanist Attack on Medieval Romance», *Huntington Library Quarterly* 23, 1959, pp. 33-48. Erasmus's *Institutio Principis Christiani* was published in 1515. For overall sane views concerning Seneca's satiric purposes (that do not over- or underplay didacticism), see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Claudius, The Emperor and His Achievement*, trans. W. D. Hogarth, New York 1961, esp. pp. 74-79, and Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, Oxford 1976, esp. pp. 129-133, 213.

¹⁵ This is esp. the view of Berthe M. Marti, «Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and *Octavia*: A Diptych», *American Journal of Philology* 73, 1952, pp. 24-36.

¹⁶ Such is the opinion of J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature*, New York 1923, p. 174. Gilbert Highet is ambivalent: the *Apocolocyntosis* is «brilliant and scandalous»; it is «instructive» but yet «a disgusting piece of brutality and flattery» (*The Anatomy of Satire*, Princeton 1962, pp. 165, 167).

¹⁷ J. Wight Duff, *Roman Satire: Its Outlook on Social Life* [1936], Hamden, Conn., 1964, p. 96; Ulrich Knoche, *Roman Satire*, p. 102; and Sigmund C. Fredericks in *Roman Satirists and Their Satire*, ed. E. S. Ramage, D. L. Sigsbee, & S. C. Fredericks, Park Ridge, N. J., 1974, p. 99: «It is probably wrong to view the *Apocolocyntosis* as a serious moral condemnation of Claudius' reign and a recommendation that this emperor's divine honors be rescinded. Everything points to its being nothing more than a piece of healthy, permissible irreverence...».

¹⁸ Although most satire's «aim» is «to instruct and to moralize... The reader will search in vain [in the *Apocolocyntosis*] for an apophthegm or a passage where society's morals and manners are taken to task for corrective or even satirical purposes». Hence, «the didactic element» in this work is «non-existent» (Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *Senecae Apocolocyntosis Divi Claudii*, introd., text, trans., & notes, Lawrence, Kansas, 1973, p. 47).

¹⁹ LX 35, 3.

of the Divine Claudius begins»). It is quite possible that puzzled copyists invented their own title (*Ludus de Morte Claudii*) or replaced the seemingly-incomprehensible word «Apocolocyntosis» with the more familiar (and redundant, when combined with *Diui Claudii*) «Apotheosis». If so, the original title might well have been *Diui Claudii Apocolocyntosis*. Dio actually explains that the strange word is modelled upon «*Apathanatisis*», or «immortalization». Since the root-word *colocynthe* means 'pumpkin' or 'gourd', the title might well be construed as the «gourdification» of the Divine Claudius —indicating that, ludicrously enough, the Divine Claudius is transformed into an Immortal Pumpkin or Eternal Vegetable. We doubtless mean much the same thing when we speak colloquially, saying *Sacrebleu* or Holy Cow.

In the body of the work, to be sure, Claudius is nowhere actually transmogrified into any animal, vegetable, or mineral. Hence literalists are sometimes led into pronouncing naive truisms:

It cannot mean 'transformation into a pumpkin', for in the work as transmitted Claudius is not turned into a pumpkin, nor is it likely that such a metamorphosis took place at the end of the work in a section no longer extant... ²⁰

Satirists have long been known, indeed, for deliberate obfuscation, for wickedly failing to deliver what their title promises. Hence the *Modest Proposal* is anything but modest, *Candide* is without openness and candor, Waugh's *Decline and Fall* never explains what, precisely (if not everything), is declining or falling. Prufrock's crippling deliberations are no «Love Song» whatsoever, and readers of Ionesco's *Bald Soprano* or of Harington's *Metamorphosis of Ajax* will be hard put to it to discover what is going on inside. Therefore it is likely, as Russo observes, that Apocolocyntosis is to be understood «not so much as a transformation into a pumpkin as the deification of a pumpkin, of a big gourd... that's been made divine» ²¹. Even better, it is implied that the already divine Emperor is metamorphosed into a Perpetual Legume, or Immaculate Peasecod. Suffice it to say that Claudius, according to this satiric fiction, has been incredibly stupid throughout his earthly existence; now by repetition he is become *stultitia* incarnate.

²⁰ Michael Coffey, *Roman Satire*, London 1976, p. 167.

²¹ Carlo Ferdinando Russo in L. Annaei Senecae, *Diui Claudii ΑΠΟΚΟΛΟΚΥΝΤΩΣΙΣ*, Introduzione, testo critico e commento con traduzione e indici, Firenze 1964, pp. 17-18. See also Michael Coffey, «Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 1922-1958», *Lustrum* 6, 1961, p. 250.

And so the title simply mean[s] that after his death Claudius remained the same fool as he had been when... alive...²²

Once again, we have foreshadowed *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

In its content, the *Apocolocyntosis* unfolds in lurching spurts with repetitious simplicity. Fixed upon earth as Emperor, Claudius appears to live forever, his life-span unrolling at an interminable rate. At length, the Fates are induced to end his long sojourn, unplugging, as it were, his constipated life. With one last fecal release and anal blast, he is launched heavenward (3-4)²³. Thereafter, the lame, shaking, stammering, and muttering Claudius arrives in the sky, frightens Hercules and, as freakish and virtually incomprehensible rarity, wins his way into a *concilium deorum* (or council of the gods) in the heavenly Senate House. After considerable debate concerning admitting him to heaven (and the foolish political tide unaccountably inclining in his favor), he is finally denounced by Augustus as the assassin of all of Augustus's relatives and expelled, exiled (5-11). In his descent with Mercury, he pauses fondly to witness his own funeral procession along the Via Sacra. Again, Claudius would prefer to linger, but is driven downward on his journey (12). At last, arrived in the Underworld, and surrounded by a veritable subterranean cloud of his former victims (13), he is placed upon trial at the tribunal of Aeacus²⁴. Then, in a final flurry of accelerating velocity (14), Claudius is at once condemned as a murderer of the Roman order and (since he had been fond of gaming in his lifetime) sentenced to rattle dice forever in a bottomless box. Yet even this trifling penalty is abruptly rescinded, when Caligula appears to claim Claudius as his slave. Winning his point, Caligula nonetheless relinquishes his victim back to Aeacus again. He is passed on to the freedman Menander, and finally made an eternally insignificant law-clerk. With that, the satire breathlessly ends.

Like most satires, the *Apocolocyntosis* «by indirections finds directions out»²⁵. And the chief comic-satiric strategy lies in repetitions,

²² Knoche, *Roman Satire*, p. 100; E. Courtney, «Parody and Literary Allusion in Menippean Satire», *Philologus* 106, 1962, p. 92, also stresses that there is in the *Apocolocyntosis* «a purely negative action; instead of undergoing ἀποθέωσις he becomes a blockhead, i. e. remains the same fool in death as he was in life».

²³ These scatological matters are rightly emphasized by Apostolos N. Athanassakis, «Some Evidence in Defence of the Title *Apocolocyntosis* for Seneca's Satire», *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104, 1974, pp. 11-22.

²⁴ Zeus had appointed Aeacus, Minos, and Rhadamanthus judges of the dead because they had led just lives in the upper world.

²⁵ *Hamlet* II, 1, 66.

which are amassed like the unlocked word-hordes of Rabelais, the incessant incantatory rhythms of iambic invective, and the fast-film sequences of events so typical in the pages of Petronius, Voltaire, and Evelyn Waugh. Throughout, Claudius is presented as the freak and the fool—twisted, distorted, disfigured, a doddering captive, a dictator dictated to by whims and occasions. «Through it all Claudius is portrayed as a fool who bumbles along without really comprehending what he has done or what is happening to him»²⁶.

Moreover, the spirit of seeming trifling and playfulness tends to prevail everywhere in this work. There is an intellectual gaiety that surfaces again and again. With Claudius' death, the narrator announces «I'm a free man», and he proceeds in the succeeding pages to set his words and scenes a-tipping and a-dancing. Claudius, we are explicitly informed in Section 8, is a «truly Saturnalian prince», and the spirit of release, of carnival, is the appropriately dominant, whirling and cavorting mood. Indeed, such an *esprit* reminds us of the traditional monarchy's call for continuity and reaffirmation: «The King is dead. Long live the King!». Added to it is a pervasive atmosphere of New Year: «A feeble dotard has gone: with the new *princeps* a golden era would return»²⁷—here is an aura of juvenescence; «ring out the old, ring in the new» is all the implicit hue and cry of the zestful *Apocolocyntosis*.

In this gala atmosphere, Claudius is, as one critic has observed, almost the *pila* or bouncing ball²⁸. He is lightly bandied and trundled about, from earth to heaven, thence back to earth, and then to hell, like a satchel of balloons. The plot itself is a virtual masterpiece of exact repetitions: a third devoted to the Fates and the decision concerning Claudius's life-span, a third preoccupied with the ascent to heaven and the hearing among the gods, a third addressed to the descent to the Underworld and the trial there. This neat repetitive and anticlimactic partitioning is particularly striking, as it lards and patches together a number of traditional extravagant Cynic motifs, found, for instance, in Lucian—the *Icaromenippus* (or voyage to heaven), the *Deorum concilium* (or congressional session of the gods), and the *Kataplas* and *Nekyomantia* (or journeys to the Underworld).

²⁶ Fredericks in *Roman Satirists and Their Satire*, p. 94.

²⁷ J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age, from Tiberius to Hadrian*, London 1935, p. 244.

²⁸ Athanassakis, «Some Evidence in Defence of the Title...», *TAPhA*, p. 22.

So effective has Seneca's surviving example of the multiple pronged heaven/hell inter-transit escapade been that its themes appear periodically, reworked, revived, and re-echoed in a variety of literary creations down the centuries: in Erasmus's *Julius Exclusus* (1514)²⁹, in Quevedo's First Vision (in the *Sueños*, 1627), in Byron's *Vision of Judgment* (1822), and (at least on the hellish side) in Philip Roth's *Our Gang* (1971)³⁰.

Also helping to fasten the parts together are the incessant abrupt reversals and satiric anticlimaxes³¹. On earth Claudius appears about to live forever, but POP! —with a sudden anal explosion he expires. The Fates resist Mercury's suggestion that Claudius's life-thread be severed, but as suddenly change their minds. Invincible Hercules appears, only to turn to jelly in cowardice before the emperor's sickly ghost. Later, Hercules reverses his suspicion of Claudius and actively campaigns for the old tyrant among the gods with the whining zeal of a ward heeler. Claudius appears to have won acceptance in heaven, only to be suddenly banished. And so it goes all through this Menippean satire until, at the close, even the seemingly final decision of Aeacus—that Claudius should rattle dice eternally, after the manner of the Danaids' punishment, in a perforated box— is flippantly in a trice brushed aside.

Some critics fret and flutter with *frisson* about a philosopher's deigning to be funny; some find him tasteless and bitter; some label him out-and-out neurotic³²; some even unaccountably chaff at the cloud of anticlimaxes and the speed-up finale:

...once the decision has gone against Claudius [in heaven] and he is taken down to Hades, his ultimate fate is very quickly decided by comparison with the lengthy controversy in heaven. As though the author was tiring

²⁹ Consult Marcia L. Colish, «Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* as a Possible Source for Erasmus' *Julius Exclusus*», *Renaissance Quarterly* 29, 1976, pp. 361-368.

³⁰ It is noteworthy that Justus Lipsius' *Satyra Menippaea. Somnium* (1581) and Petrus Cunaeus' *Sardi venales. Satyra Menippea in huius seculi homines plerosque ineptè eruditos* (1612) both owe a debt to the *Apocolocyntosis*. The *Somnium* and the *Sardi Venales* have been republished together in *Two Neo-Latin Menippean Satires*, ed. C. Mattheeussen and C. L. Heesakkers, Leiden 1980.

³¹ See John R. Clark, «Anticlimax in Satire», *Seventeenth-Century News* 33, 1975, pp. 22-26.

³² H. MacL. Currie, «The Purpose of the *Apocolocyntosis*», *L'Antiquité Classique* 31, 1962, pp. 91-97.

of the whole work, the action speeds up and the work ends rather hastily³³.

But these critics notwithstanding, such humor and anticlimactic speed are wonderfully effective components of the *Apocolocyntosis*' deliberate crafting.

There is one additional major repetition that is most important to this seemingly jolly and free-for-all creation. It is an undercurrent, a counter-motif, that surfaces only occasionally, amidst all the fun. For that very reason, it is the more powerful when it does appear. We must remember that, despite all the cartoon vagility and gaiety, Claudius has been a very real, very dangerous, and very pernicious potentate. This point is trenchantly made at the apex of Augustus's speech in heaven, wherein his indignation boils over at witnessing the underpinnings of law that he initiated and reinforced at Rome rent assunder, for Claudius has slaughtered dozens of the royal family:

Hic, p. c., qui uobis non posse uidetur muscam excitare, tam facile homines occidebat, quam canis adsidit. (10)

(«Honorable senators, this man, who seems unable to disturb a fly, used to butcher men as easily as a dog squats».)

Augustus's point is forceful enough to get Claudius, against the odds, booted out of the sky.

And that self-same theme emerges again —and most powerfully— near the satire's end (14). This time we learn that Claudius's massacres extend beyond royalty and princes, that they broaden to include all of the social classes, all of the populace.

...[Pedo Pompeius] edit subscriptionem: occisos senatores XXXV, equites R. CCXXI, ceteros ὅσα ψάμαθός τε κόνις τε.

(«...he [Pedo Pompeius] brings forward a list of charges: Senators killed, 35; Roman Knights, 221; others, as vast as the amount of sand and of dust».)

³³ J. P. Sullivan in Petronius, *The Satyricon*, and Seneca, *The Apocolocyntosis*, trans. J. P. Sullivan, New York & Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1977, p. 210. Sullivan also refers to this supposed «haste» in «Ancient Satire», *Literature and Western Civilization: The Classical World*, ed. David Daiches & Anthony Thorlby, London 1972, p. 252.

Suddenly, it is no laughing matter: Claudius has literally depleted the human till, ravished the Roman citizenry. Yet the sombre moment is dispersed (although we are not likely to forget it) and the jesting tone, swift pace, and lightsome banter recommences and prevails—even to the trivial punishments Claudius is awarded and the blithe, jaunty finale.

If we are somewhat disconcerted, and feel that poetic justice has been denied to us, we are in the right. Satire never provides such justice; in this genre all is wrong with the world. Yet that is precisely satire's point. In Seneca's serious treatise to Nero, the *De Clementia*, written at about this same time, the Philosopher makes an urgent plea for due process in law, for toleration, and for clemency as concerns the *princeps'* treatment of his peoples. And, when we reflect upon it in this light, the Claudius of the *Apocolocyntosis*, in spite of all the foolery, is a mighty exemplar of the Inclement Man. He is fleetingly glimpsed as the nonchalant mass murderer, akin to Phalaris, Lucretia and Caesar Borgia, Hitler and Stalin. In such a context, Claudius's physical tics and deformities, his unnatural bodily functionings, no longer appear as personal traits but as figures and signs of a mental and even supernatural derangement. In this he is like Milton's Satan whispering in Eve's ear, crouching and ugly —«found / Squat like a Toad...»³⁴, or like Dryden's satanic Achitophel, whose «crooked Counsells» are complemented by his withered torso:

A fiery Soul, which working out its way,
fretted the Pigmy Body to decay...³⁵,

and like Grendel or any of the nightmarish dragon-figures from epic and romance. And indeed, much of the *Apocolocyntosis'* art —itself deliberately Saturnalian, halting, ungainly, stuttering, digressive, riotous, captious, obtuse— *imitates* its joco-serious subject, Claudius, and serves as release for the constricted, fearful, and pent-up soul.

Without a doubt, then, Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* performs a multiple and repetitious service as masterful Saturnalian satire. Fittingly enough, we bounce along in its pages through rounds of frolics, puns, jests, and repasts. We are led to caper amongst distorted figures and masks, a whirling dervish of fun at the same time that we are equally coerced into a direct confrontation with evil. Such a celebration functions as a means to purgation and release. And, like all Saturnalias, it ultima-

³⁴ *Paradise Lost* VI 799-800.

³⁵ *Absalom and Achitophel*, vv. 156-157.

tely points us toward a return to our humanity, to sanity, to regular duties, to Ciceronian «offices». Paradoxically enough, by submerging us deep into disorder, the *Apocolocyntosis* inclines us toward the resumption of order. Perhaps, in truth, that's what great satire, that lurid, Saturnalian genre, is really all about. By plunging us into the nether world, it goads us into attempting to get out.

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