

**THE ARNOLD PRIZE ESSAY, 1877;
THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF
THE ROMAN SATIRIC POETRY,
PP. 1-49 (NOT COMPLETE)**

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THE ARNOLD PRIZE ESSAY,
1877.

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE
ROMAN SATIRIC POETRY.

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"Verba togae sequeris."—*Persius*.

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THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ROMAN SATIRIC POETRY.

THE treatise of Casaubon and his edition of Persius, published in 1605, contained the first exhaustive account of the origin and growth of the Roman satiric poetry. His elaborate scrutiny and shrewd sense not only appreciated but answered all vital questions. So far was he in advance of his age, that more than two hundred years passed before his conclusions were questioned. Though many volumes were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,^a Ruperti,^b in 1801, simply reasserted on every essential point the judgment of Casaubon; and for the next thirty years his decisions were undisputed; so that in 1840 a learned critic^c found it "a weary task to revive discussions which had been handled and rehandled enough and more than enough." The last forty years, however, have changed the aspect of the subject. Hardly one of Casaubon's verdicts has been unassailed;^d hardly a year passes but some new light arises. The task may still be a weary one, but it is necessary; and the result is pleasant, for it throws us back on Casaubon, and shows that genius is as free of time in criticism as in philosophy or art.

"Satira quidem," says Quintilian, "tota nostra est."^e Its root was as truly Roman as its growth. It arose in those rude outbursts in which the primitive Italians gave spontaneous expression to their mirth and mourning, to their gratitude and supplication. Unusual aptitude for rapid improvisation and smart reply, a lively imitative faculty and love for violent gesticulation mark the Italian villager to the present day;^f and in early times these national characteristics found vent in varied festivities, where unpremeditated song tended to predominate over the music and dancing with which it was

^a Especially Vulpi, 1744, and König, 1796.

^b In the introduction to his edition of Juvenal.

^c Oehler's Varro, Introd.

^d Cf. especially Petermann, Riese, Meineke, Munk, and Mommsen.

^e Instit. Or. x., 1-93.

^f Cf. C. Müller's Rome, Römer, u. Römerin i., 45. Munk de Fab. Atell. "Singularis Italicorum acies quo vitia et menda aliorum primo fere obtutu percipiunt et unde natum derisionis studium, quo olim ut hodie ceteris praestabant."

always blended.⁵ They leave their traces in the *naeniae* or dirges, in which, as in Scottish Laments, the virtues of the dead were magnified by gifted minstrels of the clan; in the ditties sung at a general's triumph by his soldiers, who rallied him for his failures^b while they praised his deeds; in ^{at agricultural} banquet songs celebrating the glories of a family's ^{festivities.} ancestry; while even the Hymn of the *Fratres Arvales*, in spite of its more sober cast, exhibits in its amoebœan form the same national spirit. But we might expect an agricultural people to be specially unrestrained in joy and earnest in thanksgiving at their harvest-home. Their work was over; their provision for the winter was secure; they were grateful to the gods of corn and wine. That it was so we have good evidence.

From a comparison of Vergil, Horace, and Livy¹ Its raillery we gather that the primitive Italians husbandmen held festival every year when the corn was stored, and honoured Bacchus and Ceres with sacrifice and song; that they at the same time bantered one another in responsive verses; that these verses were *Fescennine*;² that their laughter was unrestrained, and their sport, in the first instance, good-natured. And these statements are illustrated by the parallel raillery of early Greece, which was permitted even at Sparta. In the language of the Homeric hymn to Hermes:—

“*κοῦροι*
ἤβηται θαλίῃσι παραιβάλα κερταμένουσιν.”³

Horace leads us a stage further in the history of this rustic mirth. He says that “by degrees the jokes became checked by law. wild and the abuse slanderous, so that in fear a law was passed forbidding personal allusions; and this law secured its end by confining the singers to kindly pleasantries.” His statement is confirmed by the legislation of the Twelve Tables, in which we find:—“*Si quis ocentasit casmenve condisit quod infamiam faxit flactionemque alterei, fuste feritor.*”

“*Satura*” arose out of these rural rejoicings, and Livy explains its development. In the year 361, among other ^{This developed} attempts to allay a plague sent by the wrath of the ^{into “satura.”} gods, “*Tuscan actors*,” he says, “were summoned to Rome, who, without song or gesture, danced gracefully after the

⁵ Cf. Teuffell's *Hist. of Rom. Liter. Introd.*, and Wordworth's *Fragments of Early Latin*, *Introd. to Notes. Dion. Halyc.*, vii., 72; *παρὰ Ρωμαίους ἐν ἀπάσαις φυλλάγρασι ταῖς ἀρχαίαις θηροποισίαις.*

^b Cf. Livy vii., 10, &c. Munk, l. s. p. 2.

¹ Verg. G. ii., 326. Hor. Epp. ii., 1, 139. Liv. vii., 2.

² Some writers have distinguished *Fescenninae* as a variety of this rustic sport; indeed, Zell has specified three distinct varieties of it, but without evidence; and such phrases as “*Fescennina locutio*” point to a wider meaning, and to a reference either to the tribe in which it arose or to its Phallic origin.

³ v. 56, cf. Arist. Pol., vii., 15.

¹ Hor. Epp. ii., 1, 156.

fashion of their country to the sound of the flute. The young Romans began to imitate them; and they varied the dancing with doggerel gibes at one another in a sort of harmony with their steps." These youths were called *histriones*; but Livy clearly points out that they were the historical successors of the amateur minstrels to whom Vergil and Horace allude. "*Non sicut ante Fescennino versu similem in compositum temere ac rudem alternis jaciebant.*" Their song was now set to the music of the tibia, and their dancing was in time. "*Impletas modis saturas peragebant.*"^m

This, then, is what critics have called the Dramatic Satire of the Romans. The date assigned by Livy to its introduction is questionable. Indeed it is improbable that the change took place so rapidly or systematically; but the general fact which underlies his narrative is none the less important, *viz.*: that the change was the result of the first contact of rude Roman customs with foreign art. Method was introduced into the madness of a national sport.

Yet it was still wild and unfettered. Literary influences were not yet at work; and the absence of any contemporary literature is in itself proof that the performers had no settled text. We shall in fact find that the introduction of a plot was a complete revolution and fatal to the very essence of such pieces. Masksⁿ had been worn at the earliest festivals and may have been in use; but there can have been no attempt to represent character. The metre employed was the old Saturnian measure,—a system based indeed upon quantity, but allowing the greatest freedom in eliding, slurring, and strengthening syllables. Dependent to a large extent upon alliteration and a caesural pause marking the point at which one speaker gave place to another, it was rhyme rather than verse.^o If we imagine the jests which the clown of a modern circus^p levels at the grooms to be spoken in doggerel verse, and his capers to be in time with the music of the band, and if we further suppose both clown and grooms to be prompted not by pay but by a love for rough fun, we have an approximate idea of the nature of the Satiric Drama.

This application of the term *satira* is not merely of philological interest, but bears upon the character of the satiric poetry and upon its originality.

Diomedes, the grammarian, gives three derivations.^q The first of these is, "from the *Σάτυροι*, because in this verse too absurd and immodest remarks are made."

^m Liv. vii., 2, 6.

ⁿ Verg. G. ii., 387. "*Oraque corticibus sumunt horrenda cavatis.*"

^o Cf. Browne's Rom. Liter., p. 36.

^p Ruperti says they were "*faceta et ridicula potius quam obscena et lasciva,*" and they are compared by W. Müller and Munk to the Volkspiel of modern Venice and Naples.

^q Diom., p. 482.

Diomedes does not favour this derivation. In other passages¹ he clearly points out that, in so far as there was a parallel to the Greek Satyric play, it is to be found in the Atellan farce, a later growth, as we shall see, which was never known as "satira." Indeed, the resemblance to which he alludes in the above passage hardly goes as deep as his own words. The Satyric play was closely dependent upon tragedy, and had a like origin. Even in the hands of Choerilos² its essence lay in the contrast between serious myths and their comic representation. Demetrios Phaleros speaks of it as *παίζουσα τραγῳδία*, and its object was to relieve the spectator after hours of sustained gravity by introducing heroes and gods, lately beheld with admiration or awe, in silly or obscene situations.³ There is no trace in it of that bantering of the spectators which was distinctive of the early satira. Further, its leading feature was the presence of the *Σάτυροι* or attendants of Dionysos, and at Rome there were no similar permanent characters. Lastly, it was intimately connected with mythology, and dependent upon a sympathy with the powers of nature which was foreign to Roman thought and feeling.

These facts were in the days of Casaubon and even of Ruperti enough to dismiss at once the hypothesis of even a philological relation; but modern scholarship has revived the theory in a modified form. In accordance with the truth that "the simplest elements of art as well as of religion and economy are in Greece and in Latium quite the same," and are "to be referred to a period antecedent to the separation of the stocks," Dr. Mommsen states that, just as the decorous arm-dance (*triumpus ἑθυραμβος*) is to be traced in the Greco-Italian people, so "the *Σάτυροι* and Satirae are branches of the masquerade of the 'full' people, who, clad in goat-skins, wound up their festivals with jokes." He elsewhere speaks of the "comic dance or chant or satira" as reaching back to the same period,⁴ and asserts that "of this comic dance the popular comedy and the Fescennine songs, in all their variety, were but developments."

Now it cannot be doubted that the Greco-Italian people would have some rude form of festivity, coloured perhaps by their agricultural pursuits; and in this sense their later separate amusements had common origin. But it is another thing to say that these amusements resembled one another, and that their names are related as

¹ *Ib.*, pp. 487 and 488.

² Müller's Greek Literature, i., 294.

³ Cf. Horace, A. P., 221-230.

⁴ It is not quite clear whether Mommsen applies "satira" to the comic medley or to the new text which it received. His general theory, however, is quite distinct. "As the spectators took part in the satira, so the chorus of *σάτυροι* expressed their feelings in response to the leading singers."

ἄθροισμα to triumphus. We have seen that the Satyric play and the satiric raillery were unlike one another, in every respect save that both were comic; and the words were equally independent. For (1) the Σάτυροι were not an original part of the Hellenic play to which they ultimately gave a name. Legend ascribed their introduction to Arion, later criticism to Pratinas. Their identification with the chorus is admitted both by Greek and modern writers to mark a stage in the growth of the play. They had nothing to do with what Mommsen calls "the text or satura." (2) Even if at Rome saturoi meant men filled with wine, there is no reason for connecting this word with the earliest Italian sport. Livy first applies it to the dramatic medley after the operation of Tuscan influence, and treats Satura as the daughter, and not, with Mommsen, as the parent of 'Fescennina licentia.' We can hardly set aside Livy's position without some evidence against it. (3) Further, if it be urged that the Σάτυροι are the "full men" of early times converted by the disease of language into separate characters, we have to set aside two obvious parallels,—between the Satyrs and Fauns on the one hand, and on the other, between the festivities alluded to in the Homeric hymn already quoted (out of which the Iambic lampoon arose) and the dramatic medley of Rome. In short, the hypothesis depends upon an exceedingly improbable history of the word Σάτυρος, and an application of 'satira' for which there is no evidence.

Looking at the classical word satur, of which satura is the regular feminine form, we see its application on its very face. (a) The fulness it denotes is the result of various components. Thus in Terence we find, "postquam sum omnium rerum satur;" in Vergil, "satira praesepia" are the well-filled stalls; in Columella, "satur autumnus" is autumn with its varied riches; in Horace, "satur conviva" is the guest who has had enough of the feast; in Pliny, "satur color" is a deep composite colour; in Cicero, "satur gestus" is varied gesticulation.

(b) There was a special application of the feminine gender. The annual thank-offering, presented to Ceres and Bacchus, consisted of first-fruits of various kinds piled upon a large platter. This plateful, termed by the Greeks πάγκρατος θυσία, πάνσπεσμα, or πανήψια, the Latins called lanx, lanx satura, or simply satura. For this we have good evidence:—Acon on Hor. Satir. I. 1., "Lanx plena diversis frugibus in templo Cereris infertur quae saturae nomine appellatur." Festus Pompeius, "satira est cibi genus ex multis rebus conditum." Lydus,^b "σαρούραν τὸ καλοῦν ἐπὶ τῶν ἱερῶν." Diomedes,^c "sive satira a lance quae referta variis multisque primitiis in sacro

* Adel. v., 1, 3.
* xxxvii., 10, 61.

iii., 214.
* Manil. v., 474.

† Poet. x., 43.
* de Mens. p. 30.

† Sat. i., 1, 119.
* p. 484.

apud priscos dis inferebatur et ex copia ac saturitate rei satira vocabatur . . . sive a quodam genere farciminis . . . satira est uva passa et polenta et nuclei pini ex mulso conspersi."

Here then we might rest with Diomedes. The satiric drama was from the first connected with the festivities at which the *lanx satira* was presented; and there is no strain in supposing the name of the offering to be applied to the performance, which was an offering (*munus*) too.

(c) *Satura* was, however, used in a metaphorical sense, on the showing of the grammarians who confirm this usage of 'satura.' by valuable quotations.

Festus,⁴ "*Satura est—lex multis aliis conferta. Idque in sanctione legum ascribitur, 'neque per satiram abrogato aut derogato.'* Titus Annius Luscus in ea quam adversus Gracchum dixit. '*Imperium quod plebes per satiram dederat id abrogatum est.*" The meaning here seems to be 'in conjunction with other points,' without special consideration. *Festus* goes on to quote *Laelius*,⁵ "*Quasi per satiram exquisitis sententiis;*" the sense being that the vote was taken en masse and not in detail. Again *Justinian*,⁶—"Passim et quasi per satiram collectum et utile cum inutilibus collectum." Finally *Diomedes*,⁷ after quoting the above passage from *Sallust*, and a line from *Lucilius* ("*per satiram sedilem factum*"⁸), proceeds: "*Alii dictum putant a lege satira quae uno rogatu multa simul poemata comprehendat, quod scilicet et satira carmine multa simul poemata comprehenduntur.*"

Metaphorically, then, the word was applied to a miscellaneous compound; and we have seen that variety or vagueness was of the very essence of the early dramatic performance;—that it had no definite plot; that it admitted extempore effusions; that it was varied by dancing and singing; that, in short, it was a medley. But the most convincing proof of this derivation of the word is its later application; for we shall find it applied to species of composition which had nothing in common with the earlier satira but their miscellaneousness or variety. It may be that the word was in the first instance used because of the connection between the offering and the play; but even if it were so, the metaphorical sense soon predominated, and it was with this meaning that the word was perpetuated.

To resume: the earlier or dramatic satire was Italian in its origin; it sprang from early Italian customs, and reached its culminating point apart from Greek influence; its very name was its own.

⁴ p. 249. * Cf. *Sallust. Bell. Jug.*, 29, 5. † in *Praef. Dig. ad antec. i.* § p. 483.

⁸ In the *Princeps* edition of *Persius* this line is differently explained, *viz.*:—"Satira item dicitur lex quae fucatis verbis fallit audientes, ut aliud dicat, aliud vero significet."