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Canidia's Debut: Horace *Satires* 1.8\*

The witch Canidia, a recurrent bogey in Horace's *Epodes* (3,8; 5 and 17 *passim*) and *Satires* (I 8 *passim*; II 1,48; 8,95) has received considerable attention in recent scholarly literature. Dismissing the scholiasts' identification of her with a certain Gratidia, a perfume-seller from Naples (Porph. on *Epod.* 3,7-8; Fraenkel [1957] 61-64), many readers now approach her as a metapoetic figure, a «written woman» embodying «an indecorous poetics against which Horace tries to define his own practice» (Oliensis [1991] 110; cf. Oliensis [1998] 94-96). On the level of genre she is perceived as a «black Muse of iambic» (Barchiesi [2009] 246) and, on the level of political allegory, as symptomatic of «the blackness and crime from which the Romans must be purged» (Johnson [2011] 15, 178). Essential to such readings is the complex metaphorical significance of her name, which could have multiple origins: *canere*, referring to the imprecations (*carmina*) she chants; *canis*, both vile bitch and dogged iambicist (Oliensis [1991]; on vowel quantity see Watson [2005] 197); *Canicula*, the dog-star that saps virility; *canities*, a senescence afflicting not merely her and her fellow hags but Rome itself (Mankin [1995] 300-301).

Though it does not contest any of those serendipitous meanings, my essay pursues a more historical and pragmatic line of inquiry. Whatever its expanded metaphoric function in subsequent works, I will argue, the appellation «Canidia» in *Satires* I, Horace's earliest poetic collection, is chiefly topical. When the witch makes her debut in the eighth satire, she bears the *nomen* of P. Canidius Crassus, an individual of undistinguished background known for his rapid but irregular rise in the military and political spheres. As such, she is a negative foil to Horace, whose own problematic ascent through the patronage system this collection charts.

Like the ironic figuration of its satirist, the preoccupation of *Satires* I with literary and social advancement reveals itself in linear fashion (Zetzel [1980]; Oliensis [1998] 18-41; cf. Gowers [2003] 59). As the reader passes from one poem to the next, two dominant and interrelated objectives emerge: first, introducing the Horatian brand of satire and

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\* It is a pleasure to offer this essay to Carlo Santini in recognition of his enlightening work on Latin poetry, particularly Propertius and Ovid.

establishing its place in the generic tradition and, second, negotiating Horace's own place within the circle of Maecenas' *amici* (Freudenburg [1993] 198-211). After the three opening ethical diatribes and the programmatic defense of his art in the fourth poem, Horace takes up the potentially sticky issue of his friendship with Maecenas. In the fifth satire he casts himself as a marginalized participant in that luminary's entourage, in the sixth as an appreciative and deserving recipient of favors, and in the ninth as an involuntary apologist for the members of the circle. The two short intervening pieces, *Sat.* 1.7 and 1.8, prolong the trajectory, for they are linked together with the ninth as anecdotes in which increasingly more threatening scapegoats are excluded from the community (Anderson [1972] 12-13). Not surprisingly, those outsiders too bear some resemblance to the *arriviste* Horace.

Parallels between the satiric speaker and the sharp-tongued litigants Perseus and Rutilius Rex in I 7 or the nameless opportunist of I 9 are easy enough to point out (for the former, Henderson [1994] 161-162; for the latter, Henderson [1993]). The eighth satire, though, features an obvious non-Horatian *persona*, a wooden statue of the garden god Priapus. Drawing upon his own experience, Priapus recounts an intricately linked triple metamorphosis (Hill [1993]). Once a useless fig-wood trunk (*inutile lignum*, 1), he is now the divine protector of the surrounding terrain. That part of the Esquiline he guards, formerly a ghastly paupers' graveyard, has been converted into a salubrious park and promenade (8-16). In the course of the poem, invading witches, noxious relics of the past whom he is at first powerless to repel, undergo a reverse transformation from fearsome supernatural beings to repulsive hags when his thunderous fart frightens them off. Priapus' «chance apotheosis» (Gowers [2012] 265) from block of wood to god is reminiscent of Horace's own progress from humble beginnings (Habash [1999] 286-287). Unlike his cousins in the *Priapea*, the well-equipped custodians who threaten intruders with rape, this Priapus is mild-mannered, reminding critics of Horace's un-Lucilian brand of satire, toned down to suit Maecenas' gentrified world (Anderson [1972] 12; Schlegel [2005] 90-98; Welch [2001] 184).<sup>1</sup> If the unprepossessing statue is the satirist's proxy, then, Canidia is his opposite number. In addition to her satirical authority derived from magical speech (Schlegel [2005] 102), her name, for contemporary readers, would also evoke ruthless careerism, a charge against which Horace scrupulously defends himself.

During the Republican era the *gentilicium* «Canidius» is rare: we know of only one possessor, the P. Canidius Crassus who was suffect consul in 40 BCE (Münzer *RE* III 2 [1899] 1475f.). Obscure in his origins, Canidius became one of Antony's most accomplished generals. Herrmann, supposing that she was a real person, identified Canidia as his sister ([1953] 16-17). Recent work posits instead that Horace's label for his fictitious

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sharland (2003) 106: «Routing Canidia in *Sat.* 1.8, together with her companion witch, by means of the harmless scatological humour so common in Old Comedy (from which genre the Horatian satirist also claims descent) is to make a significant literary statement about the type of genre that the *Satires* are, and, by the same token, the type that they are not».

sorceress is meant to blacken the Antonine side by connecting her with one of its prominent members. According to Nisbet ([1984] 9), Canidia's knowledge of poisonous herbs native to eastern Hiberia, near Colchis (*herbasque quas ... Hiberia / mittit, Epod.* 5,21-22), points to Canidius' conquest of that region in 36 BCE.<sup>2</sup> This, however, appears to be the sole arguable piece of textual evidence for any intended link, and Nisbet himself pronounces it an «oblique gibe». Commentators who follow him (e.g. Watson [2003] 179-180) bolster the suggestion by citing Caesarian charges tying the Pompeians to necromancy, but that claim seems even more tenuous.

Yet, despite lack of firm textual proof, Nisbet's notion is attractive insofar as the *Epodes* and *Satires* II are concerned. In those collections, both appearing shortly after Actium,<sup>3</sup> a malevolent creature named for one of Antony's marshals might well embody Italian anxieties about military forces in the East massed under a dangerous adversary during the last years of the Second Triumvirate. There may even have been good reason for singling out this particular second-in-command. After crushing the Iberians of modern Georgia, Canidius went on to pacify Armenia in preparation for Antony's invasion of Parthia that same year (Plut. *Ant.* 34,6; Dio XLIX 24,1). As a senior officer who had served imperial Roman interests so impressively in the mid-30s before following his master into civil war, he was a classic *exemplum* of misguided loyalties.

Testimony about Canidius' death may also be pertinent. After Actium he purportedly deserted the land forces of which he had charge and fled to Alexandria (Plut. *Ant.* 68,3). Following the suicide of Cleopatra in 30 BCE he was executed by Octavian.<sup>4</sup> Velleius Paterculus (II 87,3) reports that «he died more faintheartedly (*timidius*) than befitted that calling he had always exercised». In a context where the pro-Caesarian historian is attempting to illustrate Octavian's clemency, the remark implies that Canidius' unsoldierly cowardice justified capital punishment after the fact. An admittedly late source, Orosius, adds that besides his great and persistent hostility to Octavian he was also disloyal to Antony, *infestissimus quidem semper Caesari sed et Antonio infidus* (VI 19,20). To Syme these details hinted at a propaganda effort to vilify the man posthumously ([1939] 300).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On the strategic rationale for Canidius' Armenian venture, see now Patterson 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Scholarly consensus assigns publication of the *Epodes* and *Satires* II to approximately the same period. *Epod.* 9, purporting to take place immediately after Actium, is the only securely dated poem in its collection; reference to land settlements for veterans at *Sat.* II 6,55-56 suggests a date of 30 BCE or later.

<sup>4</sup> The extent to which Canidius might have profited financially from his association with Antony would be apparent if he, as some papyrologists maintain, is the recipient of the blanket tax exemption approved by Cleopatra in a recently published royal ordinance dated February 33 BCE (*P.Bingen* 45). Van Minnen (2000 and 2001) identifies him as the beneficiary; *contra* Zimmermann (2002) and Burstein (2007) 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Ferriès (2000) 430, attempting to restore Canidius' reputation, suggests it was his obstinacy (from Octavian's perspective) in remaining with Antony to the end instead of surrendering after Actium that made pardon impossible.

Horace's eponymous caricature in the *Epodes* and follow-up jibes in the second book of *Satires* might be part of the same campaign to malign him and discredit his Eastern victories. Although accidents of preservation have left us only the sketchiest of facts about Canidius' later career, then, we know enough to conjecture that the name imposed upon his iambic or satiric *alter ego* would summon up recollections distasteful in the aftermath of Actium.

However, that hypothesis does not account for Canidia's original appearance in *Sat.* I 8, published in 36/35 BCE, the winter following the defeat of Sex. Pompey at Naulochus.<sup>6</sup> While Antony engaged in his ultimately disastrous invasion of Parthia, Octavian was intent on reassuring his troops and the citizen body that the civil wars were over and the constitution would shortly be restored (App. *BCiv* V 128, 132). Suspicions of an impending conflict with his fellow triumvir, already circulating through the army (Dio XLIX 13,3), had to be dispelled. Though Horace's initial collection, dedicated as it was to Maecenas, undoubtedly had a political import (Du Quesnay [1984]), denigrating current as opposed to former enemies of Octavian was not its aim—certainly not if an enemy was as yet unacknowledged. Thus it makes no sense to view the earliest mention of Canidia as an overt manifestation of anti-Antonian sentiment.

Yet Horace would still have had cause to take aim at P. Canidius Crassus. As Antony's supporter he rose spectacularly after Philippi, presumably for setting private interests above other considerations including military duty. When Canidius first enters the historical record, serving as legate with M. Aemilius Lepidus in Gaul in mid-May of 43 BCE,<sup>7</sup> he is reported to be urging Lepidus' disaffected troops to abandon the Senate's side and join forces with Antony. In a letter from L. Munatius Plancus (*Fam.* X 21,4 [SB 391]), governor of Gallia Comata and leader of one of the armies charged with defending the Republic, Cicero and his friends are warned of impending betrayal. In addition to Lepidus' own questionable allegiance, his soldiers are reluctant to fight against their former comrades; Plancus describes them as *improbi per se, corrupti etiam per eos, qui praesunt, Canidios Rufrenosque et ceteros, quos, cum opus erit, scietis* («insubordinate by nature, fur-

<sup>6</sup> For the date of *Satires* I, see Du Quesnay (1984) 20-21 and Gowers (2012) 4. Both assume that the Bibulus mentioned at *Sat.* I 10,86 as a potential reader is L. Calpurnius Bibulus, who left to govern Syria after spending the winter of 36-35 in Rome. Even if some of Horace's iambic poems featuring Canidia were composed before 35 BCE, as many believe, it is *Sat.* I 8 that introduces her to a wide audience.

<sup>7</sup> This is at any rate the earliest indisputable mention of him. References in Plutarch's life of the younger Cato to a «Canidius» acting as Cato's agent in Cyprus during 58-57 BCE (*Cat. Min.* XXXV 1, XXXVI 1, XXXVII 1-3) are inconclusive because most mss. of Plutarch's *Brutus*, covering the same events, give the man's name as «Caninius» (*Brut.* III 2-3; for discussion of the textual problem, see Geiger [1972]). That instead allows identification with L. Caninius Gallus, *tr. pop.* 56 (Broughton, *MRR* II 209), who sought to have Pompey appointed to settle the Egyptian question (Plut. *Pomp.* XLIX 6). If P. Canidius Crassus had actually been Cato's man in Cyprus, he would have had more time and opportunity to attain high rank and thus be in a better position to sway the loyalties of Lepidus' forces. In view of the uncertain reading, however, I take a conservative approach.

ther perverted by those placed over them, the Canidii and Rufreni and others whom you will know when need arises»). Singled out by name and spoken of in the plural, Canidius and his colleague Rufrenus are branded as ringleaders of an organized movement among the lower-level officers. Two weeks later Lepidus, faced with an increasingly mutinous army, did indeed go over to Antony (*Fam.* X 23,2 [SB 414]), an event that signaled the collapse of Senatorial resistance. Later, during the Perusine War of 41–40 BCE, Canidius apparently followed the lead of other Antonian marshals such as Plancus and C. Asinius Pollio in choosing neither side. Instead, he prudently refrained from military action until the crisis resolved itself and then withdrew to the coast.<sup>8</sup> In late 40, as a *homo novus*, he succeeded Pollio, possibly his superior officer, as suffect consul. Elevation to that position was doubtless a reward for his partisanship before and during the Perusine War.

In the chaotic years of the Second Triumvirate, cases of parvenus—provincials, sons of freedmen, alleged former slaves—climbing the ranks through military service, obtaining extralegal magistracies and being put in charge of armies were frequent enough to arouse both aristocratic outrage and popular scorn (Wiseman [1971] 8–9; Watson [2003] 148–150). The most notorious example was P. Ventidius (*cos. suff.* 43 BCE), who, as an infant during the Social War, was captured and carried in the triumph of Cn. Pompeius Strabo. From the position of army contractor under Julius Caesar Ventidius rose to become another of Antony's winning generals and celebrated his own triumph over the Parthians shortly before his death in 38 BCE (Gell. 15,4; Dio XLIII 51,4–5). His colleague the Spaniard L. Decidius Saxa began his army career, like Ventidius, with Julius Caesar, who appointed him tribune of the people in 44 (Cic. *Phil.* 11,12). Having commanded Caesarian forces at Philippi, he subsequently served as governor of Syria and was killed in the Parthian invasion of 40 BCE. Along with Canidius, Ventidius and Saxa became bywords for contemptible upstarts. Pronouncing a *suasoria* on whether Cicero should purchase immunity from Antony at the cost of burning his writings, L. Cestius Pius counseled that death in the company of past Roman heroes would be better than life *inter Ventidios et Canidios et Saxas* (Sen. *Suas.* 7,3). Cestius assumes his listeners will agree that the threesome, *novi homines* like Cicero, were the great statesman's inferiors in all other respects. Among declaimers of the following generation, then, these figures continued to trigger status resentments springing from civil disturbances in the 40s and 30s BCE.

When *Satires* I was published Ventidius and Saxa were already dead. For a writer intending to exploit such resentments, however, Canidius was still very much in the public eye. His command abroad was a stark reminder of what the contemporary historian Sallust had denounced as a disgraceful path to magistracies and military promotion: *potentiae paucorum decus atque libertatem suam gratificari* («to make a gift of one's honor and liberty to the power of a few», *Iug.* 3,3). While Sallust lays blame on the «few», i.e. the

<sup>8</sup> For Canidius' presence among this group of Antonian leaders, see App. *BCiv.* V 50,1 (where he is called «Crassus») and Ferrière (2000) 419–420.

Second Triumvirate, for the constitutional irregularities that allowed followers to bypass the normal electoral process, Horace concentrates upon the depravity of individuals so sponsored, doing so by associating his fictitious witch with abuses still fresh in memory.

If Canidia is an emblem of undeserved preferment, certain details in Priapus' narrative take on additional ominous nuances. During her nightly visitations to the Esquiline graveyard she gathers bones and foul herbs (22). Gowers ([2012] 264) suggests that the field of whitened bones «recalls the killing fields of the civil wars» in which Canidius began his army career. The other witch, Sagana, is assumed to be a complete invention, but in such a context her own name (presumably derived from *saga*, 'prophetess') might remind us of «Saxa». At the height of their indecent ceremonies, the two enact a puppet show in which a woolen doll punishes a wax suppliant (30-33). Canidia may be seeking erotic mastery, possibly over Horace as in *Epode* 17, but some elements of the ritual hint at military atrocities: the subordinate wax figure stands «like one about to die in the manner of a slave» (*seruilibus ut quae / iam peritura modis*, 32-33) and is later tossed into a fire (43-44). As females out of control, above all, Canidia and Sagana are incarnations of disorder and regression, which must be put to flight by male self-assertion, however socially inept (Henderson [1989] 60-62).<sup>9</sup> Expelled from Maecenas' precinct, Priapus' antagonists flee *in urbem* (47), a hint that they might now transfer their corrupting influence to the civic realm.

In a volume published around 35 BCE and focused on proper and improper social mobility, the name «Canidia» therefore served a precise satiric purpose, reminding readers of the author's dubious counterpart, the *homo novus* P. Canidius Crassus. Fictive characters can take on a life of their own, however, and we observe that phenomenon in Canidia. Within the next five years, she mutates into a symbol of more widespread anxieties: an impending conflict with Antony in the immediate future and a pervasive miasma of guilt arising from a century of civil wars. Yet she never fully loses her connection with undeserved preferment. Thus in *Epode* 4 Horace vocalizes the *indignatio* generated by a wealthy former slave striding down the Via Sacra: while he claims the fellow is as distinct from himself as wolf from lamb (1-2), scholars observe the irony in the last line, where his target turns out to be a military tribune, the position Horace had held in Brutus' army. In the very next epode, Canidia prepares a citizen boy for human sacrifice by employing, among other ingredients, those herbs gathered from Iolcos and Hiberia that tie her geographically to P. Canidius' victories (*Epod.* 5,21-22). The juxtaposition of the two poems must be meaningful. Although her rich metaphoric and poetological implications may overshadow her topical significance, we lose something, I think, if we do not recognize in Canidia a continuing mark of the *invidia* unfair success can generate—and a personal embodiment of the imposter syndrome.

<sup>9</sup> Contrast Priapus' thunderous discharge with the sly emissions attributed by Catullus to one of Caesar's henchmen: *subtile et leve peditum Libonis*, 54.3.

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