Lucilius

LIFE

The date of Lucilius's death is certain, 102 B.C., but the date of his birth is a thorny problem. Jerome, our source, says that Lucilius died at the age of forty-six. But if Lucilius was born in 148, it becomes difficult to accept other details that are known of his biography: when working in the headquarters of Scipio Aemilianus during the siege of Numantia, he would have been barely fifteen years old, and his literary precocity would have been extraordinary; moreover, it is incomprehensible how Horace could refer to Lucilius as an "old man" (*senex,* in *Satires* 2.1.34). A plausible alternative explanation is that Jerome, misled by nearly homonymous consuls in office in 148 and 180 B.C., has confused 180 with 148; this would make Lucilius nearly a contemporary of Terence. Others, on the basis of creditable arguments, propose an intermediate date, 168/167 B.C., which in the abstract would seem more probable.

Lucilius belonged to a distinguished, prosperous family originally from Suessa Aurunca in northern Campania. The years of his youth are certainly linked to the Scipionic circle. We are ill-informed about the latter period of his life. He is the first man of letters of good family to lead the life of a writer, deliberately removed from public offices and public life.

WORKS

Thirty books of satires, of which we possess fragments, almost all short, amounting to around thirteen hundred verses.

The edition of Lucilius circulating in the first century B.C., which is attributed to the grammarian Valerius Cato, included: books 1–21, all in dactylic hexameters; 22–25, perhaps in elegiac couplets; 26–30, in iambic and trochaic meters (the meter of Latin comedy) as well as hexameters. This order was metrical and did not coincide with the chronological order of composition. It is generally assumed that Lucilius around 130 B.C. published a first collection of five books, the ones we know, in their transmission through the grammarians, as 26–30.

In that case Lucilius turned more and more towards the hexameter; this is probably the sign of an ironic challenge, in that everyday material and colloquial, often popular diction needed to be adapted to the heroic meter. From Horace onwards the hexameter would become the sole verse pre-

scribed for satire. The books may have consisted either of single compositions or of shorter poetic units. It is not certain that the title *Saturae* goes back to Lucilius himself, but Horace uses the term *satura* in a programmatic context to designate the genre of poetry begun by Lucilius. In the fragments that are left Lucilius calls his compositions *poemata* or *sermones* (rather, *ludus ac sermones,* "joking chats"), and it has been reasonably supposed that the original title of Lucilius's work was Greek, *schedia* ("improvisations").

SOURCES

There are many citations in grammarians, metricians, and late commentators, especially in Nonius Marcellus, a grammarian of the fourth century A.D., author of the *De Compendiosa Doctrina,* a lexicon of republican Latin. There are prominent references in the works of Horace (see esp. *Satires* 1.4.1 ff., 1.10.53 ff., 2.1.62 ff.).

Lucilius was read with avid interest even under the Empire (Quintilian 10.1.93). The survival of numerous fragments is explained by the large number of very rare and difficult words in his work, which provided much material for grammarians from the second to fifth centuries A.D.

LUCILIUS AND SATIRE

Lucilius's relation to the Scipionic circle

The work of Lucilius has its roots in the cultural background that had been Terence's: the great figures of the Scipionic party, Scipio Aemilianus and Laelius, whom Terence had known as young men, became in their maturity the patrons of the satiric poet. Lucilius's social position, however, is quite different from that of the African freedman Terence, as is the patronage the Scipionic setting provides for him. Independence of judgment, zeal in controversy, and curiosity about contemporary life—qualities that the tradition recognizes in him—suit the image of a cultivated, prosperous *eques* who does not live from his own literary work. His belonging to the rich provincial aristocracy and his position in the Scipionic circle make it possible for him to launch attacks freely against some of the most distinguished men in contemporary Rome.

Etymology of satura: *the pursuit of variety*

The origins of the genre the Romans call *satura* are uncertain and were mysterious even for the learned. The connection with Greek *satyros,* "satyr," is utterly false, even though ancient: satire in origin seems to have nothing to do either with satyrs or with the Greek comic theater, in which the satyrs play an important role. It is certain that *satura lanx* indicated in early Rome a mixed dish of first offerings that was presented to the gods; hence a gastronomic specialty, such as a "mixed salad," and a form of judicial procedure called *lex per saturam,* when laws on different subjects were joined in a single legislative enactment. (The evidence of Livy on the existence of a dramatic genre called *satura* in the third century is puzzling and perhaps misleading [see p. 24].) On the basis of this evidence it is likely that the sense of "mixture and variety" was the original one and that it was felt also in the literary employment of the term. The name, then, is not Greek (as

the Atellan also is not, whereas nearly all the other literary genres at Rome have Greek names). Quintilian contrasts satire with the other genres: *satura quidem tota nostra est* (10.1.93), "satire is a completely Roman genre." The attempts of the satiric poets themselves, especially Horace, to create a retrospective genealogy in Greece, for example, referring to the mordant quality of fifth-century Attic comedy (Aristophanes) or drawing inspiration from Callimachus's *Iambs,* do not affect this basic fact. However many Greek cultural contributions satire had received along the way—and the open structure of the genre itself encouraged grafting and mixing—the original impulse is specifically Roman.

Satire as personal space

This impulse may perhaps be understood, here at the beginnings of satire, as the search for a literary genre suitable for conveying the author's personal voice. If we compare the period of Ennius, Latin literature does seem already quite developed by then, but we notice that none of the standard poetic genres—epic, tragedy, comedy—provides a space for direct expression, in which the poet can reflect his relation to himself and to contemporary reality. Yet the example of the Alexandrians, Callimachus in particular, had shown how one could create a poetry outside the epic and dramatic canons. Callimachus throws into confusion the traditional divisions of the literary genres: he talks of poetry and poetics (especially his own), of popular traditions and vignettes from daily life, and at the same time he pursues an increasingly polished and refined poetic form. The esthetic principle of variety *(poikilia)* excluded the high-sounding uniformity of epic narrative.

The satires of Ennius

Variety, personal voice, and realistic thrust are characteristics that to some degree we discern also in the fragments of Ennius's satire. It comprised four or six books, each one made up of several parts in varying meter (the meters are chiefly comic iambo-trochaics but also hexameters and perhaps sotadeans). Especially varied are the subjects that we can reconstruct: a little tale of a country man and a skylark, the satiric portrait of a parasite, dialogues, a debate between Life and Death, and, especially, appearances of the poet in the first person and touches of self-portrait. It is likely that various points in the biographical tradition about Ennius derive from the autobiographical references in his own *Satires.* In this regard, too, Ennius has an important place in the development of poetic self-consciousness. We do not know, however, whether his satire already contained hints of polemic and real attacks on contemporary people. We would be inclined to look for this aggressive side of satire in Naevius, who was known for his attacks on a certain noble family, but it is not even certain that Naevius composed satires, and we know nothing about Pacuvius's satire.

The specialization of the satiric genre and the growth of a new audience

However that may be, this form of poetry, varying in meter and subject and personal in nature, that is, open to the poet's voice and to everyday realism, presented itself to Lucilius as an ideal means of expression to develop. The great historic importance of Lucilius lies in his having concentrated exclusively on the genre of satire. (Ennius, let us remember, had practiced satire as a minor genre among many other genres, subordinate to

epic and drama.) The development of satire signifies also the growth of a new audience, one interested in written poetry, culturally aware, and eager for a literature that stayed close to contemporary reality. Lucilius said he desired for himself readers who were neither too much learned *(docti)* nor too little.

Themes of Lucilian satire:
a) *The parody of the* Concilium Deorum

A work in thirty books cannot be reconstructed with certainty on the basis of brief fragments cited mostly on account of their grammatical oddities. As far as we know, Lucilius dealt with a wide range of subjects. The first book contained a large-scale composition known as the *Concilium Deorum.* By means of a parody of the divine councils, which were typical of epic (as in Homer and Ennius), Lucilius attacked a certain Lentulus Lupus, a person disliked by the Scipios: the gods decided to have him die of indigestion. The mixture of literary parody and slanderous content recalls a work such as Seneca's later *Apocolocyntosis* would be. The parody, precisely because it was a joke at the expense of other, well-known literary texts, also carried implications for literary criticism. When the poet represented the gods, who were assembled to discuss wretched human affairs, as behaving according to the protocol and procedures of the Roman Senate, then the *Concilium Deorum,* once it was compared to contemporary reality, was revealed for what it was: nothing other than a common motif, a topos, belonging to high-style poetry, that is, a stylized convention of the epic manner. Lucilius's realistic poetry was intended to be an ironic response to the notion of literature as hollow conventionality.

b) *Description of a journey; gastronomy*

The third book contained the lively narrative of a journey to Sicily. (We will meet the theme of the journey again in Horace's *Satires* 1.5.) In more than one satire culinary advice was offered, just as in Horace's *Satires* 2.4 (it should not be forgotten that Ennius, the first Latin author who certainly wrote satires, was also the author of *Hedyphagetica* [see p. 76]). In book 30 a sordid banquet was described. More generally, references to gastronomy connected with the polemical theme of luxury in food recur in a number of books. In book 30 Lucilius told of a banquet organized by a parvenu, Granius, who is the literary ancestor of the more famous Nasidienus (see Horace, *Satires* 2.8) and Trimalchio.

c) *Love; literary questions*

Book 16 seems to have been dedicated to his ladylove. Lucilius thus is also a precursor of personal love poetry, a tendency we will come upon again, with increasing importance, in Catullus's epigrams and Augustan elegy. Then, too, Lucilius's disquisitions on literary problems are amply attested: judgments on questions of rhetoric and poetics and genuine literary critical and grammatical analyses. In this regard Lucilius recalls the rhetorical-grammatical culture of Accius; but Lucilius mocks the emphatic, declamatory style of Accius, and also of Pacuvius and other lofty poets. The criticism of these lofty literary genres is another important point of convergence between Lucilius and Callimachean taste and another link connecting Lucilius to neoteric poetry.

Lucilius's stylistic realism

We cannot say to what extent Lucilius's satires, in their broad chronological development, were tied to a unified program, and in any event it is dangerous to regard this poet as a sort of reformer. Even Lucilius's political

engagement may have been discontinuous and changeable: his relation with the Scipionic group is evident in the first satire, but the poet survived his political patrons by many years. There can be no doubt, however, about the existence of a decidedly unified, innovative literary program, sustained by a personality with a lively nonconformity. His poetry rejects a single stylistic level and is open on all sides. It amalgamates the elevated language of epic, relived as parody; the specialized vocabularies that until then had been excluded from Latin poetry, such as technical terms from rhetoric, science, medicine, sex, gastronomy, law, and politics; and forms of everyday language, drawn from the different social strata and including an enormous number of Grecisms. From this point of view Lucilius, like Petronius, is as close to modern realism as Latin literature ever gets; he even tends to feign improvisation. The poet's criticism, with its lively humor, hits at the most diverse aspects of daily life, which are taken up in their physical and linguistic concreteness, brought to life in the light of philosophical ideals, and viewed in their contrast with reality. In this sense the satire has a certain commitment to education, intimately bound up with social criticism and nonconformity. The disharmony of Lucilius's style is certainly a deliberate choice, going back to a precise program of expression that blends together life and art.

The literary success of Lucilius

As a personal voice of the satiric genre—*ex praecordiis ecfero versum,* says a famous fragment of his, "from my heart I bring forth my poetry"—Lucilius would remain a model for all the Latin satiric poets, from Varro onwards. Against the background of early Latin poetry, his capacity for having a grasp on reality would sound especially bold and new. Horace criticizes Lucilius as a poet of his own time, on the grounds of his torrential way of writing and his lack of formal polish. He thus turns against Lucilius the precepts of the Callimachean school, which Lucilius himself had accepted, though to a different degree. Yet Horace also reveres him as the inventor of satire. At least one feature of Lucilius's legacy was inevitably lost. A certain tone of lively personal polemic, including political polemic, was linked to precise social and institutional conditions; in Rome of the Empire satire will need to find other targets. Horace feels Lucilius to be distant from him in this regard, almost as distant as the comedy of Aristophanes.

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Gian Biagio Conte

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Translated by Joseph B. Solodow

Revised by Don Fowler and Glenn W. Most

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