

Satirical Apotheosis in Seneca and Beyond

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My article has as its starting point the well-known ancient satirical work, L. Annaeus Seneca's Divi Claudii apotheosis per saturam, also known as Apocolocyntosis Divi Claudii. Seneca's satirical novel describes the death of the Emperor Claudius and his ascent to heaven where his request for deification is discussed by the gods. The gods decide to deny Claudius admission to Olympus, a decision followed by his expulsion and dispatch to the Underworld for his many crimes. My main concern is with the later Neo-Latin tradition: Seneca's work inspired many imitators, including Erasmus of Rotterdam and Daniel Heinsius, who described other-worldly journeys, ascents to heaven or descents to the Underworld in the spirit of the genre. These later works included descriptions of the apotheoses of various authorities, (in)famous poets, emperors and allegorical figures. I will examine the functions of the apotheosis motif in the satirical literature written in imitation of Seneca, and I will show how the motif of the elevation into the divine status was used to ridicule authorities and examine conflicting value systems.

This article examines the motif of apotheosis in satirical narration, which was intended to mock and subvert the authority of divine emperors and kings as well as that of famous theologians and poets. In ancient religious (and political) life as well as in panegyric literature, an apotheosis was a heroic and solemn event, the highest possible honour bestowed upon humans. It was reserved for exceptional individuals who, by being elevated to heaven, achieved heroic status; this function of apotheosis was familiar from ancient Greek hero cult and numerous mythical stories about such legendary characters as Icarus, Erigone, Chiron, Merops and the Pleiades (see Bechtold 2011, 73; see also Diels 1922). In Rome, deification was granted to emperors and other heroes as a reward and (at least in theory) according to their virtuous life, exceptional military or political achievements and other services to the empire (Bosworth 1999).¹ The Stoics especially stressed the importance of virtue in gaining access to heaven, and the souls of great men were

¹ Bosworth (1999, 6) notes that the accounts of Greek heroes (such as Heracles and Dionysus) served as models for praising Augustus, and the idea that excellence on earth elevated man to the divine was a pure Hellenistic doctrine.

thought to traverse the air like stars (Pandey 2013, 422). The Stoics believed that men of great virtue and status received a higher position in the afterlife than did ordinary men, especially if they had contributed to the welfare of the state.²

In contrast, satirical narratives were usually opposed to the acts of glorification and commemoration inherent in classical panegyric. Instead of depicting rulers as objects of veneration, satires have used the apotheosis motif to ridicule the cults of historical and living persons and their solemn celebrations. In some satires the apotheosis motif was expanded from a brief episode to a longer narrative. The tradition of satirical apotheosis was influenced by the Roman Stoic Seneca and his *Divi Claudii apotheosis per saturam*, also known as *Apocolocyntosis Divi Claudii* (or *Ludus de morte Divi Claudii*), the most famous instance of this theme and considered the earliest extant example of ancient Menippean satire (Paschalis 2009, 198). As M. D. Reeve has argued (1984, 205-207), the phrase *per saturam* in the book's title does not actually mean 'satirical' but refers to the structure of the book, which combines prose and poetry; thus, *per saturam* means that Seneca wrote his work in a mixture of prose and verse. However, given the style and contents of the story, it is obvious that *Apocolocyntosis* is also satirical in the modern sense of the term, that is, the narration is satirically critical, humorous and mocking in tone.

The form of prosimetrum was characteristic of Menippean satire, which was a popular genre especially in the Renaissance and had its origins in Menippus's and Varro's satires, Lucian's dialogues and Seneca's work.³ Many Renaissance satires also described ascents to heaven or descents to the Underworld in the spirit of Seneca and other ancient texts. Given the later literary traditions, it is notable that Seneca's work includes the three-level structure, which has been considered a central feature of Menippean satire.⁴ Fantastical, other-worldly journeys form another related element frequently encountered in this genre, where the characters observe events from unusual viewpoints, such as from heaven or from high up in the sky (Riikonen 1987, 24).

In addition to satire, the other keyword of my paper is apotheosis. The concept of apotheosis has been studied in relation to the worship of emperors as divine (see, e.g., Gradel 2002). In these discussions apotheosis is sometimes used

² See, e.g., Gradel (2002, 266), with reference to Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*. Cicero here noted how human virtue was rewarded and those who had helped their country had a special place in heaven.

³ On the ancient tradition of Menippean satire and some of its medieval representatives, see Relihan (1993). Menippus's satires are not extant. Relihan (1993, 30-34) argues that the three most important subtexts of ancient Menippean satire were *The Odyssey*, *Old Comedy* and Plato's myth of Er (*Republic* 614B-621B). Plato here described how human souls were judged according to their merits and virtues, so that the just were sent upwards and the unjust downwards to the Underworld.

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, 116) has observed that in Menippean satires the action often takes place on these three different ontological levels. This structure also had an influence on the medieval mystery play, while voyages, quests, pilgrimages and other spatial displacements provided structural elements in many kinds of medieval narratives (Vitz 1989). Bakhtin gives a list of Menippean features, but he does not focus only on ancient Menippean satires (he identifies Menippean features in Dostoevsky's novels).

synonymously with *consecratio*, but as I understand these concepts here, they are distinct, albeit related, terms. *Consecratio* refers to the ritual act of making someone a god, whereas apotheosis means the act in which the deified man's soul rises to heaven and takes its place among the gods (see McIntyre 2013, 224-225; Bickermann 1929). The notion of the soul's ascent was based on old philosophical ideas. In the Dream of Scipio (in *De re publica* 6.16) Cicero famously described how, by cultivating justice and piety, great men could return to their proper place among the stars (see also Price 1987, 76). Max Radin (1916) has suggested that apotheosis meant less the process by which a man was raised to divinity and more the idea that the man was returned to his former divine state. Plato's dialogues were also important literary and philosophical predecessors of this topic in the sense that in several dialogues Plato discussed the upper earth where the soul ascends after dying (see, e.g., *Phaedo* 114B-C; Steadman 1972, 22-23). Ancient philosophical discussions readily inspired parodic and satirical interpretations of apotheoses; for example, for the Epicureans it was ridiculous to represent gods as if they existed in a human-like form. This view is also under discussion in Seneca's work, where the kind of god Claudius might become is playfully debated with the ironic conclusion being that he most resembles a Stoic god who is both headless and heartless (8.1; Dormeyer 2004, 135).⁵

During the era of Christian antiquity (between ca. 200-600), the soul's ascent was also discussed, and it was believed that upon a person's death his body was left on earth, while his soul was carried off to Hades, there to await resurrection (see Kajanto 1978). Until the resurrection, the souls of the dead thus remained in Hades, and only the souls of martyrs went directly to heaven.⁶ Satirical representations have focused on the scene of the flight from earth and on the intermediate state in which a person is dead, but his soul has not yet entered either heaven or hell, but is on its way.⁷

⁵ In this short presentation, it is impossible to give a full account of ancient ideas of afterlife. As a general rule one could note that all humans were widely assumed to possess a spirit that lasts beyond death (Levene 2012, 61). However, there are different interpretations on what happens in apotheoses. Levene supports the view that in descriptions of apotheosis the process of creating an immortal god out of a human includes a transformation of essence rather than merely a survival of the spirit beyond death (63). On the ancient ideas of afterlife, see, e.g., Hope (2009, 97-120), Casey (2009), Drozdek (2011, who focuses on afterlife in Greek philosophy). Hope (111) notes that ideas of afterlife were also related to ancient mystery cults (including the cult of Mithras) that were widely practised in the Roman Empire. In the cult of Mithras the soul's ascent to heaven was a journey of purification through different spheres. Orphism also supported the idea that one's future life depended on righteous living during the earthly existence (see Casey 2009, 89). For Plato, the soul was the true human reality and independent of the body, and death released the soul of the virtuous into a fullness of life (see, e.g., Casey 2009, 94-100, esp. 98; Drozdek 2011, 190-228, who examines Plato's ideas about the soul, its immortality and the hereafter).

⁶ Kajanto (1978, 34) notes that "the conviction that the soul descends from the ether or from the stars, is imprisoned in the body, and returns to its native place upon a person's death, was a commonplace in the philosophical and religious thought of late antiquity." On the return of the soul to heaven in funerary inscriptions, see Bechtold (2011, 376-382), Sanders (1991, 101).

⁷ This order of events could also be compared with Christian narratives, but that question must be left for another occasion. On Christian ascension narratives of Christ, see Parsons (1987), and compared with Seneca, see Dormeyer (2004). Relihan (1993, 194) claims that in the Middle Ages, Menippean satire was known as a Christian and philosophical genre. Written in the footsteps of Boethius, Menippean satire was mainly concerned with the relationship between Christian faith and secular knowledge.

The tradition of satirical apotheosis had its origin in ancient times, but the primary aim of this article is to study a handful of later Neo-Latin satires that used the apotheosis motif. These Neo-Latin works are in general not very well known and deserve to be brought together here so that the literary tradition using this motif is discernible. While highlighting selected politically and religiously critical representatives of the Latin tradition, I will also discuss the role of apotheosis in satirical narratives in general. I will explore the recurring narrative elements of satirical deifications – some of them interestingly stemming from ancient deification narratives and practices – and try to answer the question of how the motif of apotheosis has served the satirical criticism of various authorities. Although satires use mythological motifs, they use them for demythologized versions of the ascent genre. Since Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* was a major incentive for later satirists to describe the act in which a deified man's soul rises to heaven, I will first briefly discuss Seneca's work, before turning to the later tradition, which is my main focus here.

Seneca's Deified Emperor

The plot of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* is rather simple: we follow Emperor Claudius's death and his ascent to heaven where his request for deification is discussed by the gods at their divine council. The council meeting resembles a democratic and free debate, during which the gods (including Janus the gatekeeper) decide to deny Claudius admission to Olympus. This decision is followed by his expulsion and descent to the Underworld to which he is condemned for his many crimes. He ends up becoming a slave to a former freedman called Menander in the Underworld. Claudius is thus dead and hence a rather passive character who undergoes judgement and existential adventures on three levels – earth, heaven (Olympus) and the Underworld. Seneca's work contains the main elements of later satirical apotheosis narratives: the protagonist's arrival at the gates of heaven, his request for admittance, the following debate among the gods (in later satires often a trial scene), and his expulsion and descent to the Underworld. Yet another explicit satirical feature here is that Seneca combines bodily noises with apotheosis, describing how the soul of the emperor leaves the body through farting (4.3).

Emperor Claudius died of mushroom poisoning, possibly by his wife Agrippina, in 54 AD. *Apocolocyntosis* was written in the same year shortly after Claudius's death and Nero's accession, and it has been considered the most direct political attack on a Roman emperor to be preserved (Paschalis 2009, 199). Claudius's physical peculiarities (a limping gait, stuttering) and moral failings are openly mocked. Simon Price (1987, 87) calls it a biting critique of the deification of Claudius and claims that this emperor's particular (moral) failings and cruelties were the reasons for not deifying him in this satire. Some critics have suggested that the text was written to please Claudius's successor, Nero (see, e.g., Riikonen 1987, 41). This interpretation

is based on Pliny's remark in his *Panegyricus* (11.1), where he suggests that Nero deified his predecessor only to ridicule him (*Dicavit coelo . . . Claudium Nero, sed ut irrideret*).⁸ The work may have been written for the ritual context of Saturnalia, when different institutions were subject to be being freely mocked (see Versnel 1993, 109). Seneca's work has also been read as an indication of the critical attitudes of the Roman elite towards imperial deifications and emperor worship, but Spencer Cole (2006, 175-176) has stressed that by aggressively resisting the deification of Claudius, Seneca may in fact have defended the sanctity of this imperial cult practice.

We know that Claudius was buried with regal pomp and given divine honours (see, e.g., Paschalis 2009, 198). In his article on the deification of Claudius, Duncan Fishwick (2002) has observed that Seneca's description of the funeral and apotheosis of Claudius follows the same order of events as was given in Tacitus' account of Claudius's death (*Annales* 12.69; 13.2), including various honours decreed by the Senate and investing the deceased with his own priests. Both accounts also mention the funeral, and Fishwick (2002, 349; see also Gradel 2002, 299-300) reasons that in Seneca's version, the funeral was celebrated after the deification, as the practice had changed by Claudius's time. This seems historically plausible, although Suetonius (*Claudius* 45) presents a different order whereby the funeral precedes the senatorial decree of deification (Fishwick 2002, 342).⁹ This controversial topic has been debated rather extensively (see Gradel 2002, 299-304), but I am less interested in historical accuracy here, because, firstly, Seneca may have indulged in literary license (see, e.g., Fishwick 2002, 342) and, secondly, the actual order of events is after all less important in a paper that focuses on apotheosis as a literary motif. But it should be noted that in the satirical plot, it is crucial that the real decree of deification (or usually the refusal) always follows rather than precedes the ascension.

Seneca's narrative includes many elements which are familiar from epic poetry, historiography and more serious accounts of imperial ascensions, such as the use of a witness who has seen the rise to heaven.¹⁰ It is assumed that at this point the dead person was already a god and did not need to wait for the Senate's declaration. The use of the conventional motif of witnessing can be interpreted as a parody of historians' typical appeals to truthfulness and veracity. In Seneca's book, a very unreliable witness first testifies to Claudius's ascension (1.2), and then

8 See also Suetonius, *Claudius* 45; Tacitus, *Annales* 12.69. On apotheosis in Seneca's satire, see also Dormeyer (2004); Gradel (2002, 325-329); on Seneca's satire in general, see Relihan (1993, 75-90). On the motif of apotheosis in later (non-satirical) literature, see, e.g., Steadman (1972, which focuses on Chaucer).

9 For funerals of emperors, see Price (1987); Davies (2000), who notes that the decision of apotheosis for a dead emperor rested with the Senate (at least during the early Imperial period). Hope (2009, 92) also claims that the apotheosis of an emperor was not automatic, but the funerals of emperors reflected their abilities to rule well.

10 On the conventional although debatable narrative elements related to apotheosis (such as witnesses, comets and other omens) and on the use of a witness in ancient historiography, see Gradel (2002, 295-297).

Claudius himself witnesses his own funeral when he passes from heaven to the Underworld (12.1-3; see Paschalis 2009, 208; Gradel 2002, 295). This excess of testimonies creates a parodic tone in the narration.¹¹

The consecration of an emperor usually also involved other symbolic events and visual tokens.¹² The indications of divinity included the creation of the statues of the deified person's cult or such unusual events as a comet, which appeared in the sky upon Caesar's death during the games held in his honour and was thought to indicate that Caesar's soul was being taken up to the immortal gods on high (cf. Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum* 88; Pandey 2013; Fishwick 2002, 343; Price 1987, 72). Another standard procedure during the funeral was the release of an eagle, which bore the soul of the dead emperor to heaven.¹³ Graeco-Roman ascension narratives also contained such features as mountains, thunderbolts, whirlwinds and clouds.¹⁴ We do not find these elements in Seneca, but some of them appear in later tradition, as will be shown below.

Seneca was not the only writer in Rome to make scornful comments about apotheoses. Another Roman satirist, Juvenal, mentioned Claudius's apotheosis in his sixth verse satire (6.619), where he referred to Agrippina and the mushroom poisoning. Juvenal remarked that Agrippina's act merely stopped an old man's heart and in this sense was an easy ending. Juvenal says that the man was forced to 'descend' into the sky – by using the verb *descendere* he suggests that the proper direction for the emperor to go would have been downwards and towards the underworld. Juvenal's main target in this misogynist satire was the female character: he warned that all women are ready to poison their husbands and torture them using even more severe means.

Imperial apotheoses are also found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Seneca (*Apocolocyntosis* 9.5) referred to Ovid's playful accounts of deification and saw

11 On the unreliable witness and its effects on the narration in Seneca, see Relihan (1993, 78-79). Paschalis (2009, 198) argues: "The Apocolocyntosis parodies epic descents and historiographical topoi as well as the mythological otherworld of punishment and reward, ideas of afterlife, and imperial deification."

12 These symbols have been discussed, for example, by Fishwick (2002); on the tradition of imperial consecration in Rome, see Price (1987); Gradel (2002).

13 Gradel (2002, 291-295, 305ff.; Cassius Dio 56.42,3); in the case of an empress the bird was often a peacock. On imperial ascents, see, for example, Joachim Busse's *Apotheosis imperatorum Romanorum* (Wittenberg, 1662), in which Busse explained the origins and the reasons for the practice of consecrating emperors; these reasons included, among other motivations, adulation and superstition. Busse described the typical imperial funeral, and mentioned the eagle, which was released from the midst of the funerary smoke when the emperor was incinerated and which was believed to carry the soul of the dead person to heaven. The eagle was also often depicted in coins commemorating the past emperor. In his *Tractatus historicus de apotheosi, sive consecratione, imperatorum Romanorum* (Strasbourg, 1730), Johann Daniel Schöpflin also studied the concept of apotheosis in general and then focused on Roman emperors (and female empresses) in particular. He examined ceremonies related to deification and those different signs, symbols (eagle, peacock) and moral qualities that were associated with dead emperors in pictorial representations after consecration. On Claudius, see Schöpflin (1730, 27-28).

14 See Parsons (1987, 138), who argues that these features were common with the Jewish assumption stories, but the references to mountains, clouds and angels played a more important role in pagan literature.

Claudius's case as a sequel to Ovid's humorous series of deified human beings. Ovid made extensive use of the fabulous apotheosis motif and described the deification of the mythical founder of Rome, Romulus (14.805-828), and his wife Hersilia (14.829-851) in a manner that imitates Homeric gods' solemnly driving their chariots through the air in the *Iliad*. Ovid account is also consistently playful and toys with the motifs of apotheosis:

Omnipotent Jupiter nodded, and, veiling the sky with dark clouds, he terrified men on earth with thunder and lightning. Mars knew this as a sign that ratified the promised ascension, and leaning on his spear, he vaulted, fearlessly, into his chariot, the horses straining at the blood-wet pole, and cracked the loud whip. Dropping headlong through the air, he landed on the summit of the wooded Palatine. There he caught up Romulus, son of Ilia, as he was dealing royal justice to his people. The king's mortal body dissolved in the clear atmosphere, like the lead bullet, that often melts in mid-air, hurled by the broad thong of a catapult. Now he has beauty of form, and he is Quirinus, clothed in ceremonial robes, such a form as is worthier of the sacred high seats of the gods. (14.816-828; trans A. S. Kline)¹⁵

Metamorphosis was an important theme in apotheosis narratives, since the whole idea implied a transgression from one kind (human) to another (divine).¹⁶

In addition to Roman writers, Lucian wrote satirical dialogues that described downward journeys and trips to the upper spheres. His *Dialogues of the Dead* show how important authorities are punished in the Underworld, whereas *Passing of Peregrinus* concludes with a vision of a vulture which parodically rises to heaven, lampooning imperial deifications. In Lucian's *Assembly of the Gods* the gods complain that their dwelling place, Olympus, is becoming over-populated as men are being deified without merit, and they complain about the proliferation of barbarian gods on Olympus (Relihan 1993, 132). While ridiculing polytheism, this statement may also reflect the fact that the system of imperial deifications had gradually become more common and, as funerary inscriptions show, in the fourth century apotheosis was gradually extended to all levels of Roman society, including to ordinary men.¹⁷ On the other hand, criticism of apotheosis was increasing, and in the Christian views that held a more monotheistic image of god, such an abundance of deified mortals was problematic and meant the worship of the dead as gods.

¹⁵ On Romulus' ascension, see also Price (1987, 73-74).

¹⁶ On apotheoses in *Metamorphoses*, see Feeney (1991, 205-214). See also Levene (2012), who discusses whether gods and humans were distinguished by kind and as fundamentally distinct species of being in ancient Rome. Levene supports the view that in Rome people did not merely move from one status to another in narratives of apotheosis, but transgressed a real ontological boundary.

¹⁷ For examples of pagan and Christian funerary epitaphs, see the various articles in Sanders (1991). I thank the editor of this volume for this reference; she has also noted that during the Empire, imperial apotheosis was becoming more 'democratic' in the sense that it spread widely to all levels of Roman society, and immortality ceased to be the privilege of heroes and emperors. Kahlos (1998, 208) points out how the iconography of the imperial apotheosis was adapted to describe the ascent of normal individuals in numerous funerary inscriptions in which the deceased either becomes a god or ascends to the gods (i.e., two different narrative traditions).

Christian polemicists were openly hostile to the deification of wicked emperors (Price 1987, 99). For example, in his *Adversus nationes* (1.64) Arnobius asked why men worshipped violent tyrants by erecting temples and altars, although these tyrants did not fear the gods; rather they slaughtered men and thus should be hated (see also Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 1.10.29-33). Along with this criticism the state cult of the Divi and the consecrated members of the imperial family began to collapse after the middle of the third century (see Gradel 2002, 356-369).

Joel Relihan has observed that in antiquity there was "a long tradition of comic depictions of heavenly examinations and rejections of potential divinities" (1993, 122). Towards the fourth century such Menippean forms and symposia became increasingly popular in literature (see Riikonen 1987, 10), which may reflect the need to change old rituals and reconstruct new world images. For example, Emperor Julian (fl. 360s) described in his Greek satire on the symposium of the gods known as the *Caesares* (or *Convivium*) a feast set in the Homeric heaven and offered to the gods and Roman emperors by Romulus. An essential element of this satirical symposium is a comic contest for deification, after which one winning emperor will be admitted to heaven. In late antiquity, for example, in Paulinus's and Prudentius's works, the right to ascend directly to heaven was granted to all righteous souls (and not just to martyrs; see Kajanto 1978, 37), but Julian's comic and corrupt heaven has no respect for virtue or other merits. Thus, not only is the applicant who is looking for divinity ridiculed, but so is the whole of heaven, with its gods and the system of supernatural judgement depicted as foolish.¹⁸ According to some interpretations, the divine council is often a parodic mirror of the Roman Senate (Gradel 2002, 326). Later Martianus Capella described the apotheosis of personified Philology in his *De nuptiis*, where virtue is considered sufficient justification for apotheosis.¹⁹

Seneca contributed to this theme by introducing a single unworthy applicant and relying on the specific nature of Roman apotheosis (Relihan 1993, 122). My main concern here is to examine the motif of apotheosis in selected later satires that were influenced by Seneca's work.

Erasmus's Deified Pope from 1517

Seneca's novel was lost during the Middle ages but recovered in early sixteenth century (Jones 1981, 6). It enjoyed widespread influence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (de Smet 1996, 56), when writers published satirical

¹⁸ On Julian's work, see Relihan (1993, 119-133, on the comic contest for deification see esp. 120-127). It is worth noting that Jesus is one of the gods in Julian's heaven. Divine councils (which decided the fate of an individual) were also common in satirical literature of the early modern period, but I have to leave that discussion for another occasion. One of the most famous Neo-Latin representatives of this topic was undoubtedly Justus Lipsius's dream vision *Somnium* (on this satire, see, e.g., De Smet 1996, 88ff). Likewise, I have left aside the rich tradition of satirical underworld narratives and concentrated on the more specific and unstudied apotheosis motif.

¹⁹ On Capella's work, see Relihan (1993, 137-151).

apotheoses of various authorities, newly deceased popes and rulers. In German carnival literature the motif of apotheosis had already been used in such farces as “The Apotheosis of Pope Joan” (ca. 1480), but the most influential example of the later Latin tradition was the dialogue entitled *Iulius exclusus e coelis* (1514, published 1517), which is usually attributed to Erasmus of Rotterdam and became very popular, being reprinted many times.²⁰ The name Julius does not refer to Julius Caesar, who first received divine honours from the Roman state and became the model for later deifications (see Price 1987, 71), but rather to Pope Julius II, who died in 1513. Funerary inscriptions have shown that in late antiquity (during the fifth and sixth centuries) the souls of popes were thought to ascend to heaven immediately after death (Kajanto 1978, 46); here, however, Erasmus’s satire describes how the entrance to heaven is not free, but has value precisely because it is closed and many are excluded (see Vitz 1989, 77).

The story does not describe Julius’s actual apotheosis or physical ascent, as did some later satires (see below), but concentrates on a dialogue between Julius and St Peter set at the gate of Christian heaven. The dialogue on the threshold of the gates of heaven acts as a specific ceremony or a test (or a concrete turning point) in which the powerful become powerless. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), trials and gates were traditional places of ultimate decisions and crises and offered a place for reviewing and summing up one’s life and testing the truth.²¹ Dialogues on the threshold had their predecessors, for example, in the Socratic dialogues and in Plato’s *Apology*, where Socrates speaks in defence of himself. Bakhtin (1984, 110-111) has argued that in the Socratic dialogues, the truth was produced in the dialogic interaction between the discussants. The satirical trial scenes follow the structure of Socratic and dialogical search for truth, in which the protagonist is provoked to speak and thereby disclose his false opinions, but the satirical perspective often makes the outcome of these conversations predictable.

Julius is surprised that the doors do not open to him, and he suspects that someone has changed the lock. While Seneca’s Claudius was accompanied by the Goddess Fever, Julius is followed by his Genius who suspects that his master has brought the wrong key, namely the key to his money chest, which is the key of power and not of wisdom and which does not open the gates of heaven. This claim underlines that worldly prestige has lost its effectiveness in heaven, and Julius is basically made powerless after his death. Another feature typical of

20 On Seneca’s work as a source text for Erasmus’s satire, see Colish (1976). Colish notes that there are many thematic similarities between Seneca’s and Erasmus’s satires (starting from the protagonists, who are recently deceased and notorious historical figures). She mainly focuses on the availability of Seneca’s text to Erasmus and concludes that Erasmus probably studied three fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Apocolocyntosis* at Oxford in the early 1510s. I will concentrate here on the literary side of Erasmus’s dialogue; for its historical context and religious arguments, see, for example, McConica (1974); Fabisch (2008).

21 According to Bakhtin (1984, 116), the threshold dialogue was also widespread in the Middle Ages – there were peasants arguing at the gates of heaven – and during the Reformation in the so-called literature of the heavenly gates (*Schwellendialoge, Himmelsporten-Literatur*). It should be noted that the idea of an access to the other world by means of gates was familiar already in ancient Egypt.

satirical narratives is that former popes and rulers try to enter heaven by force or flattery instead of earning the status of divinity through virtue or merit. Pope Julius aggressively tries to kick the door in and threatens the gatekeepers with excommunication until St Peter arrives; then in order to decide whether Julius should be admitted to heaven, Peter investigates his case in a typical trial sequence.²²

Satires focus on the idea of justice and reward, and the trial scene is a literal setting in which the former life of the dead person is scrutinised in order to assess his virtues and vices. As can be readily imagined, the trial scene reveals that the kings, popes and eminent theologians depicted in satires were not true benefactors who should gain direct access to heaven, but only cared about themselves and their own welfare.²³ Julius’s true nature becomes clear when his secret habits and immoralities are thoroughly examined during the divine mock trial. Whereas Claudius was interrogated by a divine council, Julius’s life is examined by St Peter, the acknowledged gatekeeper of the Christian heaven. In a meticulous scrutiny the pope tells about his worldly career and even though he believes he is recounting his great deeds, he is found guilty of many ‘standard’ papal crimes, ranging from lust and nepotism to pederasty and many other sins. Not even military achievements bring divine status if they are the central merits in a pope’s career. Erasmus severely criticizes the warrior pope’s military obsession by depicting him at the gates of heaven with a number of mutilated warriors who smell of gunpowder.

Julius was known for enjoying war and sending troops to various fights and battlefields across Europe; according to this satire, he had made a contract with his soldiers, promising that those who fought for him and the church would fly straight to heaven, no matter what they had done in their former lives. Erasmus introduced cruelty and violence to the pope’s severest moral failings and used simple satirical tools while denouncing him. St Peter feels sick as he studies the applicant, whose rotten nature reeks of the sewer, the stench that comes from him being a literal representation of his character; the pope belches and smells as if he has just come from a very long drinking party. The narration underlines that Julius does not bear a trace of being an apostolic man (*vir apostolicus*) or a vicar of Christ (*vicarius Christi*); thus, he is unfit to be taken to heaven. In the conclusion Julius is considered an outstanding example of rotten theologians, those who lose their position as first among equals. St Peter, in contrast, holds the true spiritual and political power in these narratives: he is the decision-maker in whose hands lays the judgement of deification, which was not a mere formality, but a political and moral decision granted only to men who passed St Peter’s moral test. Erasmus

22 Trial narratives formed a popular rhetorical genre in the Renaissance period. The philosophical and rhetorical traditions met, for example, in early modern fictitious courtroom defences, which were situated in court before an opposing party and a judge – a similar trial scene was found in Erasmus’s *Moria*. In these playful courtroom narratives the personified Gout (or various other ills) acted as an advocate to defend herself against common opinion, rumours, impugment of her reputation and false accusations presented against her by the crowd. See Kivistö (2009, Ch. 3).

23 It should be noted that the Christian tradition places less emphasis on the effects of human work or merit, and more on divine grace.

constructed a clear moral confrontation between the corrupt secular papacy and the simplicity of the apostolic Church (see McConica 1974, 454).

Erasmus's satire points out that the protagonists of satirical apotheoses usually represent power positions, institutions and ideologies. Menippean satires did not merely criticize the individual who was being tested, but focussed also on the ideas and ideologies for which the person stood (see Bakhtin 1984, 114). Satires ridicule the human rituals and practices of elevating some mortals above others and lifting them to the status of divinity by following arbitrary religious customs. While Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* was a political satire on a deceased tyrant, Erasmus's target was another living ritual related to the place of the papacy. Jones (1981, 9) has rightly noted that Erasmus was writing from within the Christian tradition and thus was commenting on a completely different religious system than Seneca. Erasmus shows how the human hierarchies of the Catholic Church look silly to men who do not participate in them; the pope is just another mad tyrant whose cult seems fossilized and corrupt to outsiders who do not belong to the religious elite who maintain the ritual. While new cults grew up and priesthoods were given to Roman emperors when they died, in these later satires popes and theologians had their priests, cults and temples (to themselves) while they still lived. Pope Julius was worshipped and honoured as a deified hero and saviour during his lifetime, but after his death his cult dissolved. As a pope, he was supposed to be the successor to Christ and his servant, but Julius's profane life made him unworthy of this Christian heritage. Erasmus's satire was typical of the age of religious turmoil, and it was overlaid with moral functions and protests against the Catholic habit of assuming that a pope's power had a divine origin. It was also used for anti-Catholic polemics in other European countries. It was, for example, translated into English in 1673 by English Protestants and used in their assaults on the alleged corruption of Catholicism (Dodds 2009, 236).

Geldorp's Deified Inquisitor of 1559

Erasmus's popular dialogue served as a model for many satires that are less well known today. One adaptation was by the Dutch humanist and theologian, Heinrich Castritius Geldorp (Henricus Geldorpius, 1522-1585), whose *Ruardi Tappart . . . Apotheosis* (1559) describes the apotheosis of Ruard Tapper (1488-1559), a chancellor and scholastic theologian from Leuven who was notorious for his activities as a fanatical and ill-mannered inquisitor. The writer of this satire, Geldorp, had initially been a Catholic, but then turned to Calvinism, which may

partly explain his vitriolic tone.²⁴ The description of the apotheosis appears in the Franeker edition of 1643 preceded by two short verse satires and followed by some pasquinades.²⁵

Satires often concretize abstract concepts as if they were literal. Although Seneca did not provide any detailed information as to how Claudius approached Mount Olympus (Paschalis 2009, 211), here the ascension is narrated as if it were an earthly journey and a strenuous climb to heaven. The climber, Ruard, complains that the path is surprisingly narrow, meandering and slippery, and he doubts whether such a modest path can actually lead to heaven.²⁶ There is no place to stop, no one to ask for advice. The arduous path reminds one of the hard path of virtue – another important theme of its own and found in allegorical representations; while the path of virtue is narrow and trodden by very few, the wider route of vice is easy to walk, yet more crowded. Ruard is sweating and short of breath as he climbs, and the muddy path stains his clothes. The dirt is meant to mock the theologian and underline the dirtiness of his soul; his appearance also reminds one of the wicked souls in Plato's Myth of Er (*Republic* 614D) who are coming up from the earth full of squalor and dust; likewise, Ruard is unable to free himself from earthly gravity. Ruard is accompanied by Genius, his inner spirit or guardian angel, who often appears as a young boy in visual imagery. Genius was familiar from Roman imperial narratives, but here he represents the individual conscience of the protagonist on his pilgrimage.²⁷ When Ruard complains that his legs are fatigued, Genius delivers a moral condemnation and openly ridicules his master, reminding him that those very same legs were quick to take him to the princely court in his former life. In the representations of ancient imperial ascensions the usual visual elements included a horse-drawn chariot, falling stars and other sublime signs and symbols depicting the flight of the soul through the air and its rise to heaven, whereas here the journey upwards is emphatically difficult, corporeal and made on foot.²⁸ The theologian's body does not vanish, but is taken to heaven, at least as much as his soul. The

²⁴ On Calvin's ideas about deification, see Mosser (2002). He argues that deification was not foreign to Western Christianity, but it was present in Calvin's theology as it was in the patristic tradition, and deification should not be considered as an example of the corrupting influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity. Mosser argues (53), however, that Calvin described pagan notions of deification as false and traced the condemnable rise of polytheism to the practice of deification. Mosser also notes that Finns have discovered deification in Luther.

²⁵ Geldorp's pamphlet was also printed in several editions and translated from Latin into Dutch in 1572. Pasquinades were lampoons situated in a public place and known as another type of irreverent literary genre. The name pasquinade comes from the statue of Pasquino in Rome on which short lampoons were posted (and they were also dealing with Julius II). The statue of Pasquino can be considered a satirical counterpart to the cult statues that were erected to deified emperors. Ruard's apotheosis is here followed by a short pasquinade entitled *Evangelium Secundum*, which describes the family tree of the Anti-Christ. He is the son of the devil, who gave birth to a pope, whereas simony gave birth to cardinals, who gave birth to courtesans, who gave birth to papal bishops, etc.

²⁶ Geldorp (1643, 21): *Nam angusta haec via est & flexuosa; quodque . . . mihi plane ignota, nec unquam talis credita, quae ducit in coelum.*

²⁷ On the role and worship of the emperor's Genius in the Roman state cult, see Gradel (2002, 162-197). See also Levene (2012).

²⁸ On star symbolism and apotheosis in antiquity, see Bechtold (2011).

arduousness of the upward climb can be read allegorically, illustrating the difficulty of rising above one's earthly and sinful self to become godlike.

It is noteworthy that Ruard seeks admission to heaven splendidly dressed – a feature that was mocked in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* quoted above and in Erasmus's Julius, who wore a triple crown and a pallium shining with gold and jewels, indications of his worldly power; he was also fully armed. This attire was supposed to be emblematic of Julius's nearly divine power and supreme status on earth, but for the reader these triumphal features parody divine epithets. Ironically, the expensive, festive (pontifical or funeral) clothing reflects luxurious living and makes an evident contrast to the truly Christian humble soul. Ruard is equally well prepared for his long trip, wearing several layers of clothing, and he has also drawn a garment over his head in the Roman manner.²⁹

In trying to enter heaven, Ruard has recourse to his usual habits of flattering and lobbying, and he presents a bunch of ritual documents, papal privileges and diplomas to testify to his divine attributes, as he believes that no one will be taken to heaven without a pope's blessing. He boasts that in princely courts he was already adored as a tutelary deity (*numen tutelare*) and an oracle who worked miracles (*pro miraculo*),³⁰ and he desires to continue his godlike status. However, his explanations and official papers do not convince St Peter, who is guarding the gates. Wondering at Ruard's opulent clothing and dirty appearance, which resembles the look of a charcoal-burner, St Peter requests Ruard to tell the truth about himself.

Unlike the pious souls, whose admission is welcomed with the congratulations of the angels and heavenly music, travellers such as Ruard are subject to a rigorous moral examination. The dialogue again revolves around a trial sequence, during which St Peter observes Ruard's character and openly makes fun of him. The historical Ruard Tapper had plentiful experience in sitting and judging heresy trials, but here he is forced to sit through his own interrogation. St Peter laughs at his stories, calling them the best comedy he has heard for a while. St Peter also laughs at certain jokes about Ruard's farting. He feels sick (*mihi nauseam movent*) listening to the list of Ruard's theological titles. St Peter has never heard of Ruard's predecessors and such scholastics as Jacobus Latomus, an eminent theologian from Leuven, who was known as an opponent of Erasmus and Luther and said to be the most feared theologian in Leuven. Equally unknown is the defender of Catholicism Johann Eck along with others of his ilk, which suggests that scholastic theologians and anti-Protestant polemicists were carried off directly to the Underworld. We learn that while the gates of heaven were sometimes spontaneously opened to pious souls who were carried to heaven on the wind, for men like Ruard the doors are heavy and ultimately remain closed.

29 Geldorp (1643, 26): *Sed unde tandem tam lutulentus ades? Tam soleatis crepidis, tot interulis, thoracibus, togis, penulis, soccis, iisque omnibus duplo suffultis insutus? Quid capite obvoluto venisti instar morientis puerperae? Tam promissis unguibus, ut ligones videri possint? Illotis manibus?*

30 Ibid. (27): *Regum mensis non ut conviva, sed numen quoddam tutelare totius Monarchiae assedi: quod dicebam, quod suadebam, oraculum erat: quoties quid faciebam, ita omnes me suspiciebant, ut coelique erebique potentem.*

The trial discloses Ruard's luxurious living on earth with other impious scholastic theologians, and accordingly, the decision is made that Ruard will join Pope Julius II in the Underworld where he belongs by reason of his inquisitional activities, hypocrisy and other sins familiar from medieval and Renaissance anti-clerical and anti-scholastic satire. The dialogue ends with a scene in which Ruard wonders where all the shadows and darkness have suddenly come from and what is all the mourning and crying he hears around him. The last words (in verse) are uttered by the chorus of the Underworld and by the guard of the passage, Cerberus. The ferocious snarling and growling of the dog amusingly resembles the name of the main character: "Ru, ru ru ru, ruar ar ar arrr, ruarr, ruart." It is noteworthy that in satires, the ascent to heaven is always the beginning of the story and not an ending as it might be in a person's real life. On the other hand, satirical apotheoses usually end in the Underworld, when the applicant is denied access to heaven, but gains admittance to another place among other sinful souls.

In their earthly lives Ruard and the other protagonists of satirical deifications were so dignified that all doors were open to them, if by no other means then at least through money or threats. Ruard Tapper had assumed an almost a divine status in life and was a frequently seen guest at princely courts and among those who held worldly power. But at the gate of heaven, these alleged miracles seem ridiculous, Ruard and other previously powerful figures become weak, submissive and less threatening. Satirical criticism was directed at men who adopted the position of gods during their lifetime, and also at all those who supported such a false system by granting divine status to mortals. Erasmus and Geldorp criticized the systems of papal and other divinities, which were supported and perpetuated by human hierarchies and in which the leaders' positions were confirmed by tradition. Later eighteenth-century theologians observed that apotheosis reflects corrupted habits and the decay of religion in general if the object of tribute and worship was the mediator of God's word rather than God (see Fallon 2007, 9).

Other Historical Figures at the Gates of Heaven

Another early modern satire using a similar plot structure in which the goal is heaven was *Virgula divina* (1609) by the Dutch philologist, satirist and humanist Daniel Heinsius; it was directed against his contemporary, the writer Kaspar Schoppe (see De Smet 1996, 170). The title refers to a divine rod as a symbol of power and authority of God, but it also connotes the moral sentence and content of satire; Varro gave the same title to one of his satires, which has been preserved only in fragments. Heinsius was familiar with Seneca's work: he composed a dissertation on Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and also wrote many other Latin satires. In his dissertation on Seneca's satire (*De libello L. Annaei Senecae in Claudium, sive Claudii Apocolocyntosi, & praesertim de inscriptionis causa dissertatio*, 1619), Heinsius claimed that Claudius was considered the stupidest of the Roman emperors

and a symbol of the unflattering characteristic of *stupiditas*, which he discusses here in detail. Heinsius stressed that Seneca's book was not about Claudius's death as much as it was about what happened after his death, including the cult surrounding his idolized figure and his consecration.³¹ Heinsius playfully stated that Claudius achieved immortality by eating a (poisonous) mushroom. Heinsius's dissertation largely centred on a hilarious commentary on the title of Seneca's satire and the medical and humorous dimensions of the pumpkin (*colocynta*).³²

In his *Virgula divina* Heinsius imitated Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* by describing the death of Schoppe's father (whom he called Lucretius Vespillo) and the father's unsuccessful claim to divine status (see de Smet 1996, 170). The ascent to heaven is again described as an extremely laborious and physical climb up Mount Olympus.³³ Vespillo briefly pauses in the middle of the climb to take a breath, giving the whole story an amusingly realistic tone, while underlining that the protagonist has already taken his last breath. According to a more fantastical explanation given in Heinsius's text, Vespillo pauses to watch his own funeral, as did Claudius in Seneca's satire while on his way to Hades. While listening to his funeral dirge, Vespillo observes whether people handle his body properly and according to his merits. The satirical tone intensifies when, after a hard nine-day climb, Vespillo finally reaches the top of the mountain and transgresses the limit between earth and heaven. There he meets the Horae, the goddesses of seasons who guard the gates of Olympus. The goddesses turn out to be very worldly figures, at least in the protagonist's eyes. Contemplating the movements of their celestial bodies, he describes their heavenly beauty in terms that resemble passionate love poetry, praising their milk-white skin, the divine splendour of their teeth, their purple lips, sweet kisses and round trembling breasts. The Horae are portrayed as wearing seductive, transparent clothing and embodying the joys and sensual pleasures of heaven. The ascent is far from being a solemn, otherworldly event; indeed, it is full of both mundane and erotic tones in the manner of many ancient (rather than Christian) depictions of the earthly paradise and its erotic delights.³⁴ Once again the ascent is followed by a trial scene or questioning of the dead man's life course and morality. Rather than being praised for his merits and lavished with celestial rewards, the protagonist, in this case, Vespillo, is found guilty of many crimes and sins, as is usual in satires; like Seneca's Claudius, Vespillo is turned down by the gods and sent to the Underworld in punishment.

31 Heinsius (1657, 534) claimed that Seneca had two targets for his satire: *Nam et Claudii stupiditatem et religionem stultam Romanorum, ac praesertim morem consecrationis, sive apotheosim, ab Augusto introductam, lepide sugillat.*

32 On the process of pumpkinification in Seneca's satire, see also Braund (1998, 298-301).

33 Cf. Dante's *Divina Commedia*, in which he described Purgatory as a mountain with seven levels. Another similarity between Dante's epic and satirical apotheoses is that before the poet approaches God, he undergoes an examination in the three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity) by Peter, James and John (Casey 2009, 286).

34 On the delights of earthly paradise, see Casey (2009, 295).

Other texts in the later tradition include *Elixir calvinisticum* (1615) by the French Jesuit François Garasse (1585-1631). His work ridicules the recently (1614) deceased philologist Isaac Casaubon, who asks to be admitted to heaven but is denied access, and, as Ingrid De Smet has nicely observed, passes to the Underworld through Great Britain, the shortest way to Hell.³⁵ This satire plays with star imagery and various literary allusions, showing how, instead of deification (turning men into gods), satirical protagonists are forced to experience other kinds of bodily metamorphoses (into plants and animals) as a satirical reversion of deification. In Seneca's work the transformation was called 'pumpkinification'; in Garasse's text famous literary men are turned into spiders, scorpions, vipers and other unpleasant creatures as indications of their poisonous character.³⁶ Apotheosis meant a transition from a worldly self to a more transcendent or spiritual self, but just like Claudius's afterlife was envisaged as a continuation of his earthly living (Paschalis 2009, 206), in the same way the popes, rulers and intellectuals depicted in these stories refuse to undergo any fundamental change. On the contrary, they try to enter heaven without abandoning their former bad habits and assume that they can continue their corrupt ways even after death.

Parodic apotheosis scenes have been rather common in literature throughout the ages, from the finale of Goethe's *Faust* to smaller works. Lord Byron's *Vision of Judgment* (1822) was another, much later, hilarious description of an apotheosis in poetic form, hurling attacks against the late King George III.³⁷ In its key passage this satirical piece of poetry described how St Peter, again sitting by the celestial gate, suddenly hears an unusual noise – "a rushing sound of wind, and stream, and flame, / in short, a roar of things extremely great" (16). St Peter assumes that it is just another star gone out, but a cherub informs him that it is actually George III, who is now dead. Despite his powerful position on earth, the newcomer is not immediately identified, like Seneca's Claudius, who at first was not even recognized as human (5.3),³⁸ and Erasmus's Julius, who was called a monster. St Peter inquires, "And who is George III?" and learns that he is the king of England. He recalls that the previous royal ruler who tried to enter heaven was the headless king of France. The poem describes how the king is transported to heaven in an imperial manner by a chariot of angels, and his fate is discussed there in the same way as in similar satires. The motif of apotheosis was sometimes used to criticize one's fellow poets, and here Byron ridiculed his contemporary, the poet laureate Robert Southey, for writing flattering panegyrics and serious-minded texts of adoration in praise of

35 On this satire and its historical context, see De Smet (1996, 188-190).

36 The sentence given here goes as follows: *In Bufonem ipse vertatur, Baudius in araneam, Buchananus in scorpium, Anticoto in viperam . . .* (Garasse 1615, 43-44).

37 On Byron's satire and its debt to Erasmus's Julius, see Jones (1981).

38 See Braund (1998).

King George III.³⁹ The representation of apotheosis parodied the solemn ways of celebrating political or other leading social figures and was meant to disparage serious eulogies and their conventions. Byron's main target of criticism was the high-minded exaltation of mortal figures and the sublime poetics it entailed.⁴⁰

The Gate Closes

The central idea in the satirical representations of apotheosis was based on a structure of reversal and subversion. In the Neo-Latin satires discussed above the ascent to the heaven is depicted as corporeal and strenuous, not a light rise to the heavens, and the ascent is usually supplemented with descent. While serious and solemn apotheosis narratives extolled the merits of heroes and saints, satires played with the idea that people who have been on the highest level in the human social or ecclesiastical hierarchy are now subject to divine judgement and a drastic decrease in their social capital. As Simon Price has stated (1987, 56), the apotheosis of Roman emperors offered a key to understanding their power, and power is also the key word in satires, which are meant to be narratives of how someone powerful loses his worldly position. The satirical subversion of official power was visible, for example, in Erasmus's *Iulius exclusus*, which was highly critical of the traditional position of the papacy; although the text described a heavenly journey, Erasmus was mainly concerned with earthly matters. In the medieval world the pope had been the living god, whose power was unquestioned; there was no sphere beyond his control, as he was the vicar of Christ and his divine rights (see Wilks 1964). Erasmus, however, ridiculed the divine nature of the papacy by stripping all power from the newly dead pope whose former position of divinity and pre-eminence was acquired from tradition and long-held policies or perhaps by flattery or fear, not through virtue or merit. Instead of being elevated to an even higher status (that of god) through an ascension, the protagonist becomes – through the satirical act of subversion – powerless and passive when he dies.

39 Poets, such as Homer who was an important intertext of apotheosis narratives, were also sometimes adored as divine. On Homer's cult and consecration, see Gispert Cuper's (1644-1716) *Apotheosis vel consecratio Homeri* published in 1683. Cuper was a classicist and professor from Deventer, who described in his work the later celebration and adoration of Homer. Statues, temples and cults were dedicated to Homer as the greatest of all poets. Cuper concentrated on the consecration and cult of Homer and did not discuss his ascension to heaven.

40 The parodic motif has even found its way into Finnish satirical and political literature. In Sasu Punanen's causerie, "Maallista ja taivaallista" (Earthly and Heavenly, in *Punakaarti, kuningas, vehnäpulla ja porvari*, 1928), upper-class conservatives are amazed that socialists and those who fought with the Reds in the Finnish Civil War were allowed to enter heaven. Equally welcomed to heaven were all those who died in military prison camps. Some literary representations gave divine status to exceptional athletes. The mythical athlete Elmo in Juhani Peltonen's eponymous novel (1978) was an outstanding fictive sports hero who outplayed his competitors in every possible field from races and skiing to ice hockey and football. In a fairytale-like ending, Elmo is shot into the sky like a human cannonball out of an Austrian circus and thus humorously elevated to the status of divinity.

The satires studied above had a characteristic repertoire of recurring narrative elements – a hard climb, the gates of heaven, high hopes and usually also expensive garments, which bespeak vanity and former luxurious living. Sometimes the ancient motif of the ascent to heaven was modified into the motif of the path to virtue, an important motif of its own that had its roots already in Greek literature and Hesiod. Neo-Latin satires also use the narrative potential of upward and downward movement here. According to the views of some philosophical schools in antiquity the human soul has a natural inclination to move upwards,⁴¹ whereas the satirical movement is ultimately in the opposite direction, downwards. Moreover, the protagonist is not an active agent of this movement; he does not perform an action, but rather undergoes it as a passive object, forced to obey the impetus given to the movement by the satirist.⁴² One could also argue that former heroes who, in more flattering narratives were sent off to heaven without dying, are now forced to acknowledge their mortal condition and face death, which means an end to their human power. The satirical argument emphasizes that the fate of eminent men was by no means distinct or different from the fate of the common man, since no one can triumph over death.

The contrast between inside and outside is also important for the satirical plot. The dichotomies of inside and outside or open and closed were familiar from medieval narratives and from Guillaume's *Roman de la Rose*, for example, which amassed different words of entry and described the protagonist's desire to enter a closed space (such as a garden) as a symbol of his erotic or religious desire.⁴³ Such narratives were composed of acts of entering or being refused entry or being expelled; also conversations about the hero's request to enter were important textual elements (Vitz 1989). In the same way, in the satires discussed above the expectations of the protagonist are frustrated when he is left out and literally expelled from paradise instead of being allowed to enter into the realm of the sacred. The satirical characters can have an existence only outside heaven. The gate remains closed as a sign of simple negation and condemnation by the satirist.

The satires discussed above were rather unequivocal in their denunciation of their targets. They show a clear moral commitment rather than adopting a relativist attitude to moral or philosophical values, as did some Menippean satires in the Lucianic spirit (see Duncan 1979, 89). The allegorical representation is combined with serious moral overtones, whereby the profane dialogue ultimately becomes a detailed indictment of the protagonist's sins, faults and crimes. The questioning presented by St Peter reveals false gods, un-deifies the vicious protagonists and thus affirms moral justice at the point of death. Moral failings and cruelties on earth

41 See Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* (1.17.40): . . . *hae rursum rectis lineis in caelestem locum subvolent, sive ipsa natura superiora adpetente sive quod a gravioribus leviora natura repellantur.*

42 As Joel Relihan (1993, 83) has noted, the passivity of the main character is essential in Menippean narratives and is crucial to their action, as death propels the protagonist forward.

43 See Vitz (1989, Ch. 3), who also interprets this structure of desire through sexualized metaphors of attempted penetration.

were the main reasons for excluding formerly powerful men from heaven, since in the moralizing satirical poetics, virtue was needed to earn a place among the gods. In satires men are emphatically represented as deified *men*, whose earlier exceptional position was granted by humans. As Ittai Gradel has pointed out in his studies on heavenly honours, “humans can, according to Seneca, elevate a man to heaven; only the gods, however, decide if he will actually be admitted” (2002, 329). This notion nicely sums up one of the key arguments in religious satire, which underlines that human beings cannot decide about divinity.

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