

# 4

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## The poor man's feast: Juvenal

Juvenal is the satirist of comparatives and superlatives. In exploiting hexameter satire's partnership with epic, he sets out to look bigger, denser, ruder, slyer, angrier, fleshier, more sophisticated and bilious, to the power of ten, than all the other satirists before him put together. Next to this heavyweight, Horace's bitter-sweet social commentary, or Persius' harsh medicinal concentrate, should begin to taste like very thin soup. Juvenal rejects outright Callimachean principles of slenderness, compression, and refinement, claiming instead to be driving his chariot "down the track which great Lucilius blazed" (1.19–20).<sup>1</sup> Horace's irony lite, or Persius' short sharp shock therapy, is to be replaced by behemoth-scale onslaughts inspired by the bellicose Republican freedom fighter. Whereas Horace buries Lucilian rage beneath manicured lawns, Juvenal digs up a century of pent up angst, yet only to hurl it at corpses who cannot answer back.<sup>2</sup> This is war, and there is no escape, either for his victims or readers (and we may well suspect that they are one and the same in his book). The dysfunctional morass of contemporary Rome incites antirationalistic gibe, not spiritual inner journeys or jocular reflection among friends. "Today every vice has reached its zenith," he announces in his opening poem (149); "doesn't it make you want to cram wax tablets with invective right there on the street corner?" (63–4). As he prepares to hoist every last inch of his mock-epic sails (1.150), he warns his readers of impending conflict: they risk blushing beetroot, or sweating themselves ill with guilt, once he starts swinging his satirical sword (165–7). But by the end of the first satire, we realize that the warning may not have come soon enough: "once the soldier dons his helmet, it's too late to chicken out of war" (168–70). This satirist shames his audience into tasting the bile that spurs

<sup>1</sup> See Courtney (1980) on what Horace, Persius, and Juvenal have in common. Note in particular that Juvenal mentions Horace as one of his models at 1.51.

<sup>2</sup> *Sat.* 1.170–1. Note that this is nothing new: Persius and Horace also appeal to the precedent of Lucilius in their programmatic satires (*S.* 2.1 and *Pers.* 1).

his verse<sup>3</sup> (*facit indignatio uersum*, 1.79), talks down from his lofty pulpit to taint readers with his own humiliation as social outcast. In doing so, Juvenal is constantly force-feeding readers the experience of empire itself, as illustrated in satire 10, where every talent and success (from the gift of the gab to beauty and fame) is ultimately twinned with failure and deterioration, just as imperial power is doomed to self-destruct. The heights of pseudo-epic pomp are scaled, it seems, only to stage a more sensational fall from grace.

This chapter will race thematically through Juvenal, painfully aware of what it cannot cram in. Along the way I will be flagging and responding to some central ideas in contemporary criticism of Juvenal. For instance, while it is safe to say that we have long stopped labeling this satire as documentary type “realism,” the problem of how sincere (or how self-satirizing) the Juvenalian persona is at any point has remained a dominant concern: do we recognize in Juvenal the fervent conservative moralist, or the prejudiced, hamfisted hack constantly sending himself up, and is it always simply either/or? Can anyone slash their way through the fogs of deception to tell genuine from faked, as Juvenal asks in satire 10.2–4? Much has been written on Juvenalian anger, and on the shifting emotional tone of the satires: *indignatio* seems to wane after book 1, yet to what extent is this a ruse?<sup>4</sup> Similarly, critics have disagreed over how to read the looseness, inconsistency, and messiness of Juvenal’s style and structure: is it a mask that slips to reveal Callimachean precision, and if not, does it signpost “bad” art?<sup>5</sup> Scholars have long tried to nip and tuck the awkwardness of Roman satire to fit the equilibrium of a “classical aesthetic,”<sup>6</sup> and until recently there has been strong resistance to reading sardonic self-consciousness into Juvenal’s “superficial” and “undisciplined” posturing, not least because this would risk making *us* his victims. Yet one of the things I will be stressing is that the satirist is always knee deep in his own muck. We’ll see that Juvenal turns inside–outside distinctions inside out and back again, to implicate everyone and everything in Rome’s flabby, edgeless empire.

<sup>3</sup> On *indignatio* as a feature of Juvenal and other writers of the period, see Ramage (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Braund (1988) is the lengthiest work on anger in Juvenal, arguing that “irony” replaces *indignatio* as the dominant mode in the third book.

<sup>5</sup> On Juvenal’s notorious “loose construction,” see especially Kilpatrick (1973).

<sup>6</sup> See discussion in Freudenburg (2001) 6. Dryden’s discussion (1900, 84–5) inadvertently demonstrates the difficulty of making Juvenal presentable, satisfying reading: comparing Juvenal to Horace, Dryden writes that the former “fully satisfies my expectation . . . he drives the reader along with him; and when he is at the end of his way I willingly stop with him. If he went another stage it would be too far.” Yet in the same paragraph, “he is sometimes too luxuriant, too redundant; says more than he needs . . .”

## Thinking big

Juvenal's sixteen satires, split into five books (1–5, 6, 7–9, 10–12, 13–16), begin in the monstrous cosmopolis of Flavian Rome, and expand to zigzag to the ends of the earth and back again, if only as a journey of the mind. In satire 2, Juvenal wants to escape to the North Pole, imagines a trip to Hades, and traces the map of imperial conquest west to Ireland and the Scottish highlands, and east to Ardaschan. We do not need to travel far to live the Greek life in Rome in satire 3, plunge the depths of the frozen sea of Azov to spy the origins of a prize turbot in satire 4, and visit everywhere from Corsica, Egypt, Asia, and the Sahara to the mythic paradise of Phaeacia in satire 5, before Juvenal dumps his victim back in the slums of the Subura where he belongs. The opening lines of satire 10 appeal to readers to scour the globe from Cadiz to the Ganges to find a man who can distinguish true from false. Satire 15, the last complete poem, spins out the adventure holiday of a lifetime through the cannibalistic heartland of Egypt, stopping to scan imperial conquests in Spain, Britain, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Iceland. These xenophobic satires all boomerang back and forth between the cultural stewpot of urban Rome and the sites of provenance and destination for its kaleidoscope of imports and exports. The point is that in Juvenal Rome *is* the world: it has become so saturated with people, influences, vices, that it has both devoured the entire globe and come to represent it in freakish concentrate. Juvenal's transformation of the satiric recipe sets out to expose, indulge, enact, and even to outdo this excess. In other words, these poems perform imperialism, are as piggishly stuffed as Rome itself.

The most virulent vice in Juvenal's landscape is the crazed pursuit of fortune, fame, and Hollywood-style scale, and his caricature with the most screen time is the corpulent millionaire or wannabe aristocrat. This creature boozes, feasts, and belches his way through the day, wolfing seven courses alone (1.94–5), gobbling up legacies, waddling to the bathroom holding a belly swollen with undigested meat (1.142–3).<sup>7</sup> The emperor Domitian fulfills all the criteria for sickening greed in satire 4, as does his courtier Montanus with his “slow, gross paunch” (4.107), and the gourmand host in 5.114–15 dining on foie gras made from a liver as big as the goose itself; or the woman in satire 6 (428–32), who drinks until she spews from her bloated gut and almost drowns in her own vomit. Husbands' bodies are blackened and bloated with poison in satire 1 (69–72); the eel caught in the River Tiber for satire 5's dinner party is fat with sewage (*pinguis torrente cloaca*, 105), alongside the prize turbot presented to the emperor in satire 4, which is

<sup>7</sup> Compare Persius' “death in the bath” scene at 3.98–106.

“torpid with sloth” from its icy hibernation (*longo frigore pingues*, 44). In satire 6, a modern Medea poisons her two children with “steaming black pies” (631): “Two kids, in one meal?!” (641).<sup>8</sup> Lawyers are puffed up with self-importance, and strain their lungs until they burst (7.108–12), while the blue-blooded advocate needs eight stout Thracian slaves to carry him through the forum (7.132). In satire 8, we see fat Lateranus, the consul turned muleteer, boozing himself into a stupor in the baths, low-class cabarets, and seedy taverns (173–8). And the bull Juvenal would have wanted to sacrifice to celebrate the return of his friend from a mock-epic sea voyage in satire 12 is so well fed that he can hardly move, with a neck so massive only the heftiest priest could slash through it at a stroke (10–16).

### Eating disorders

This is satire which aspires above all to satiety, to fulfillment of the grossest hunger, ambition, and wickedness. Like Persius and Horace before him, Juvenal plays on the etymology of satire: *satur*, meaning full, and *satura*, meaning mixed platter. But the idea in Juvenal is always that Roman satire is now allowed to run rampant, to pack so much in at such an emotional pitch that it becomes unsurpassable. Nevertheless, Juvenal’s characters and satiric personas are perpetually dissatisfied, their bellies painfully hollow even after the feast, just as in satire 1 Juvenal resigns himself to paining readers with the same indigestible mishmash. Fullness to the point of bursting frustrates the desire for more, a desire which may have been the point of eating to begin with. These satires constantly imagine the problem of what happens when a gluttonous empire has no more room to distend, in terms of a physical satiety which paradoxically registers as a hunger with nowhere to go. As we will see, Juvenal’s constant play on contradictory perspectives is rooted in this dilemma of empire and appetite.

In satire 7, which bemoans the fate of today’s unfulfilled writers, the contemporary poet is the epitome of greed: “of course it comes cheaper to keep a lion than a poet: poets have bigger bellies” (78–9). In the dinner party of satire 5, the host eats *haute cuisine* while guests are served inedible scraps; poor man Trebius leaves the dining room even hungrier, and his “empty rumbling belly” is pure pantomime entertainment for the well fed: *quis melior plorante gula?* “what better than a whimpering gullet?” (158). In satire 15, the Egyptian rabble tears apart its victim raw, bones and all, but so many

<sup>8</sup> The cannibalistic connotations here (we are reminded of Procne’s and Philomela’s murder and barbecuing of Itys) represent the limits of sick fantasy, the “ultimate” sin. Compare with Juvenal 15.

want a bite of the action that each man gets only a morsel, and the last in line are left to scrape blood off the ground with their fingernails (89–92): cannibalism, already a perverse hunger (one analogous to the satirist’s own parasitism), fails to satisfy. When, at the end of satire 14, the speaker predicts that the maxim “wealth does not bring happiness” needs updating, that the “minimum wage” needs to rise, he sets a trap for the domino effect of ambition: even if he doubles, triples the amount, you will not be self-fulfilled (14.327–9).

So on one hand Juvenal seems to reject the simple diet advocated by Horace and Persius in favor of aspirational, hedonistic cuisine, while on the other he pillories the conspicuous consumption of the corrupt upper classes, from which he himself is excluded. So in satire 1, Juvenal’s verse is introduced as a *farrago*, a pigswill made up of the rancid scraps of humanity it feeds on (85–6), minced up literary culture for an audience with no taste. Yet Trebius in satire 5 is a figure of fun, and satire 3 makes the pauper an “eternal butt for bad jokes” (147–53). If you are poor and cannot afford private transport, you get beaten up in the street *and* get sued for damages, such is your “freedom” (3.297–9), although in satire 10 (21), only the penniless citizen escapes the highwayman and is happier owning nothing. Juvenal’s strategy is disorienting polarization and juxtaposition. Outrageous extremes dizzy the perspective, and are then exposed as fissured or on the verge of collapse. The poor man and the rich man dine together, eating foods at opposite ends of the social spectrum (satire 5), yet the dining room is never so simply divided: even on first reading, we taste the irony that the gloating maitre d’ dines on a dubious “dish of mushrooms such as Claudius guzzled, before the one prepared by his wife” (146–8), while the frustrated guests have been vaccinated by the filthy salad dressing (“a prophylactic against venomous snakes,” 91).

### Perspectives and disorientation

There are several points at which Juvenal spells out his strategy of blowing things up out of all proportion only in order to achieve maximum deflation or disorientation. The edifices of gargantuan Rome itself, which stand as a constant allegory for this satire, are built on very shaky foundations and continually threaten to topple (3.193–6). In satire 8, similarly, the speaker warns that to lean on borrowed glory is foolish, as “the pillars may fall, and the house collapse in ruin” (8.76–7). Sejanus’ pursuit of excessive wealth and honors “built up a towering edifice, storey by storey, so that his final downfall was that degree greater, the crash more catastrophic” (10.104–7), while the satirist in 11 sneers that the more broke greedy gourmands are, “like

some house about to collapse, with daylight showing through the cracks,” the better they dine (11.12–13).

Sometimes structures founder or shrink if only you look at them from another angle: if you view a beehived lady from the back, you see a sawn-off midget forced to stand on tiptoes for a kiss (6.502–7). Planet earth was not big enough for Alexander, yet in death “a coffin was measure enough to contain him” (*sarcophago contentus erit*, 172). Frequently too, Juvenal cranks up the scale: if his friend is distraught on losing a couple of hundred bucks, imagine what it must feel like to be robbed of 5K or more, a pile so big “even the largest strong-box can scarcely contain it” (13.74). And all too often, we are hit with two opposing perspectives at once: the vices of Rome are unimaginable in number, yet all this can be “contained in one courtroom” (*sufficit una domus*, 13.160). The pitched battles between Thracian cranes and Ethiopian pygmies would look hilarious in Rome, but deadly serious in a land where soldiers stand about one foot high (167–73), just as women with breasts as big as their babies look normal sized in Egypt (163).

It is Juvenalian rhetoric which really ensures that these *exempla* hit home. His satire claims tragi-epic stature and gutter street-cred all at once, and this is communicated in a jagged contrast between grandiloquent, archaic rhetoric and poeticisms, and the biting vernacular (obscenities, Grecisms, diminutives, slang, neologisms) which constitutes satire’s fast food. The defamiliarizing antithesis we have seen working on the level of narrative or subject matter is even more striking on the level of poetics: overtly lofty registers that destroy any semblance of Horatian *sermo* (conversation) are twinned with colloquialisms. Or they are partnered with un-Latin Hellenisms whose harsh consonants grate the Roman ear, often jammed at the end of the line, or slipped in at the beginning of the next for maximum impact (e.g. *bulbuco* at 7.116). The hyperbolic is lined up with the microscopic, prompting critics to compare Juvenal to a film director or miniaturist, painting in epigrammatic flashes or zooming in for a close up before panning out for the skyline shot.<sup>9</sup> In the middle-distance, Juvenal’s poems often look like they split halfway, or come apart like a concertina. He has regularly been charged with incoherence or “loose construction,” and classicists have debated whether the introductions of poems 4 and 7, for instance, were written and tagged on afterwards.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is Juvenal’s tactic to accumulate illustrations without a clear logic or sense of unity (indeed, contradictions and shifts of opinion are often designed to expose where *you* draw the line between tough talking and vile prejudice), so that the reader is often forced to weigh up the relative

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Ferguson (1979) xix–xxii; Kenney (1963).

<sup>10</sup> See Anderson (1957) and Kilpatrick (1973).

strengths and weaknesses of characters and arguments, to pursue a continual project of “compare and contrast” without the guiding light of any consistent authoritative voice. Juvenal is the most impersonal and elusive of the Roman satirists.<sup>11</sup>

Satire 4, poised just as the first book is cranking up to its culinary climax, is probably where this collage of effects packs the most punches. This satire looks like it folds in two: the first section of narrative (v. 1–27) concerns Crispinus, the Egyptian freedman come good whom we also met in 1.26. He is the cradle-snatching monster of iniquity who bought a huge red mullet for sixty gold pieces, to eat by himself. The second, apparently unconnected section, amplifies the first (and not only in its length). The emperor, implicitly, is Crispinus blown up in epic caricature, a sickening glutton who is flattered when a fisherman presents him with a gigantic turbot, and summons his courtiers as if to an emergency war cabinet to decide how it should be cut up and cooked. The debate over an outsize fish, which cannot fit even on the largest platter<sup>12</sup> (*orbs* = “round body,” as well as “globe,” 132), is a trivial event which suggests the full magnitude of Domitian’s tyranny:<sup>13</sup> Domitian cuts throats as easily as he slices his dinner, can whip up the terror of his courtiers over a recipe, never mind a *real* issue. Paradigmatically here, Juvenalian bathos is a boom and bust affair, vacillating histrionically from horror to farce, and from world to plate, until the scale that measures big, small, bigger, biggest, threatens to snap. Line 17, *ut perhibent qui de magnis maiora locuntur* (“as those who talk up big things bigger would say”) describes the satirist’s machinations; line 11, *sed nunc de factis leuioribus* (“But now onto a lighter topic”), is a sardonic dig. When the speaker announces *malim fraterculus esse gigantis* (“I’d prefer to be a giant’s little bro,” 98) to mean “I’d rather be a nobody,” this is clearly in the eye of the beholder, as even the younger sibling of a giant is huge. The *sinus* in which the turbot is snared in line 41 could mean (big) bay or (small) net; the (huge) fish is caught in a (tiny) skiff (*cumba*, 45). Juvenal combines snappy, short sentences with overblown periods (e.g. 28–33), and the sharpest lines jigsaw opposing textures and scales (see 131–2, or 109–10: *saeuior illo | Pompeius tenui iugulos aperire susurro*, “more ruthless was Pompeius, whose tender whisper slit men’s throats”). The vocabulary of magnitude abounds (*tanto*, 18; *magnae*, 20; *magna*, 32; *maiora*, 66; *magnae*, 74; *saeuior*, 109; *grande*,

<sup>11</sup> Declamatory satire was an unsuitable medium for autobiographical criticism, and we know next to nothing about Juvenal’s life.

<sup>12</sup> Compare Horace S. 2.4.75/77, where his advice was not to cram too large a fish onto too small a plate.

<sup>13</sup> This point is developed in Gowers’s reading (1993a) 202–11.

115; *magis*, 119; *plurima*, 119; *ingens*, 124; *magni*, 125; *magnis*, 133; *magnus*, 145, etc.).

Up close, the perspective verges on the hallucinogenic. We start off with comparison: Crispinus is a *monstrum* (2), but so is the emperor's fish (*monstrum*, 45); Crispinus is already appearing *iterum*, "again," in line 1, but Crispus and Crispinus are also two of Domitian's courtiers at 81 and 108. Crispus and the turbot have both survived winters by being mild and sluggish (*mite ingenium*, 82–3; cf. *tardos et longos frigore pingues*, 44), never swimming upstream (*numquam contra torrentem*, 89–90; cf. *torrentis*, 43); the courtier Montanus' flesh is also as lethargic as the turbot's (*Montani quoque uenter adest abdomine tardus*, 107). In the first Crispinus narrative, the speaker comments that he could have bought the fisherman for the price he paid for the fish (25–6), and when the fisherman in the second story offers the turbot to Domitian, he says *propere stomachum laxare sagina | et tua seruatum consume in saecula rhombum* ("purge your stomach of its last meal and eat this turbot, served to adorn your reign," 66–7). *Sagina* is a strangely unflattering word to use, being the kind of small fry fed to bigger fish. The "flattery" makes Domitian's imperial crest rise (*et tamen illi surgebant cristae*, 69–70), and later on the courtier Veiento flatters the fish (or is it Domitian?) in precisely the same terms, saying *cernis erectas in terga sudes?* ("do you see the row of spines sticking up along his back?" 127–8). Identification of perpetrator and victim, or the extent of each character's wickedness, splinters at the first stages. All the figures in this satire blur into the belly of the fish, which, although too fat to swim, "wanted to be caught" (*ipse capi uoluit*, 69): is Domitian a cut-throat, or a pathetic sucker for sycophancy, is the fisherman also the fish, are the victimized courtiers passively in control? This confounding of our perspectives on scale and blame pulls its punchline at 154: "the man whose hands were wet with the Lamiae's blood was done for." The Lamiae personify the senatorial class suffering under Domitian's tyranny who will eventually get their revenge,<sup>14</sup> yet the threat is magnified if we think bigger and remember that they are also bloodsucking bogeys of Greek myth, victims turned avengers who seize and kill the offspring of other women.

Thus on one hand satire 4 teaches us to think like Juvenal, Crispinus, and Domitian, to think big, mythical, epic, imperialistic, anarchic, to let our imagination loose on a grand scale. Like the courtiers coping with a gigantic fish, we learn that Juvenal's verse demands a deeper casserole than

<sup>14</sup> Domitian executed Aelius Lamia, a consul, in CE 80. He was murdered by his niece Domitilla's steward Stephanus, an officer called Clodianus, a freedman named Maximus, a chamberlain, Satur, and an unnamed gladiator (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 17).

any predecessor. Yet reading Juvenal may be more like riding the whims of a tyrant than studying the *National Enquirer*, as this satire actively undermines our objectivity and sense of scale, letting us glimpse a tyrant's glee only to position the reader as a courtier, aristocrat, or civilian forced to realise that the despot's crazy, unpredictable perspective is the only one that counts.

### Contagion and carnival

Nobody and nothing escapes Juvenal's poison pen. His satire continually emphasizes that its writer is immersed in the vice he censures, that everything is sullied. Corruption is contagious ("Infection spread this plague . . . just as in the fields a single scabby sheep or pig destroys the entire herd," 2.78–81). Even the innocent stroller is constantly at the mercy of slops, falling pots, and roof tiles in the Rome of satire 3; in satire 6, the morning after whores relieve themselves in the streets, their "innocent" husbands splash through the stale urine on their way to work (6.309–12). In the rhetorical schools of satire 7 (the breeding ground for Juvenal's hybrid of low and high literature), the canonic texts of Virgil and Horace are stained black with lamp oil (7.226–7). We have already seen how the rich host of satire 5's feast does not escape his own dirty trick, just as Juvenal's parallel dinner party at satire 11, set up to look like a pure organic experience, turns out to be a yuppie farce held within earshot of the Circus, possibly the epicenter of urban filth.

Juvenal's satiric persona is a performer, speaking to or at his readers, nagging and jabbing them with rhetorical questions and anaphora. As we have seen, it is our guilty consciences and red faces which are to take center stage in his war of words. A key feature of all our Roman satire is its carnivalesque role-swapping (writers and readers, teachers and pupils, patrons and clients, giants and pygmies), but in no other Roman satirist is this more aggressively staged. Satire 1 begins *semper ego auditor tantum?* "must I always be in the audience?" Juvenal has begun by acting as his own scathing critic, getting his audience's retaliation in first. He has been bored to death by Cordus' ranting speeches, that over-dense *Orestes* overflowing the margins of its roll, he is tired of stale mythological themes and clichéd rhetorical tropes (here Juvenal looks much like the obnoxious heckler of Persius 1, lashing out at the Lucilian-style trash which the satirist is setting out to write: *quis leget haec?* 1.2). Yet if you can't beat 'em, he reasons, join 'em: his audience will have to suffer not only the torment of yet more of the same, but also the frustration of having their own reactions flaunted as predictable. And unlike the fired up poet, they will have to listen "calmly and reasonably" to this performance (*si uacat ac placidi rationem admittitis, edam*, 21). The bait of solidarity Juvenal offers here is a devilish trap, his initial change of sides a

failsafe alibi for bad poetry: he is just parodying, and self-consciousness can lift him ranks above the likes of Cordus. Moreover, the dense allusiveness of the opening spiel on contemporary literature ensures that it will always be the reader, especially the educated one, who will be caught out untangling citations, never the satirist himself, who knows these mythical landscapes “like his own back yard” (7).<sup>15</sup>

A similar role reversal is developed in satire 7, although as critics have emphasized, by his third book Juvenal looks more slyly than aggressively ironic. In lines 150–70, today’s teachers are the sorry victims of their students, who churn out an insufferable bubble and squeak (*crambe repetita*, 154), which looks synonymous with Juvenal’s *farrago* of 1.86, and drives the abused teacher to the gladiatorial arena. To read Juvenal, do we too have to stoop to (lower than) his level?

Satire 9, Juvenal’s only dialogue poem, dramatizes the ambiguous and dangerous position of the listener. Here, Juvenal plays aloof, Socratic audience to gigolo Naevolus’ tale of woe, butting in only to request further detail or give snippets of advice. Naevolus is depicted as a sophisticate turned brute, a cyclopic, coarse figure (he has a single slave, just as Polyphemus had a single eye, 64–5) lashing out against his tight-fisted customer Virro. Apparently, the satiric speaker just has to sit back and let Naevolus sketch his lifestyle in grotesque detail, send himself up as a despicable victim no better or worse than his shadow, Virro. But once more, it is the twist of the knife in the last lines that makes us rethink. Naevolus implicitly compares his speech to the Sirens’ bewitching song, which makes Odysseus’ crew jump overboard to their deaths if they listen to it (9.148–50). Fortune may have blocked her ears, but what happens to the audience in the poem, or even to us as readers (again, Juvenal seems to be “on our side”)? Can the satiric speaker really be so remote, so unmoved, so unsexed? Juvenal’s wry reaction to Naevolus’ excitement in line 102 alludes to Virgil, *Eclogues* 2, where Corydon, who is in love with his master’s favorite, Alexis, asks himself “O Corydon Corydon, what madness has seized you?” (2.69). Of course the fact that this is “parody” provides the perfect cover for implication or sincerity, but this is a dangerous game. Is Juvenal engaged in a dialogue with himself, does he set *himself* up to look like Virro’s rival for Naevolus’ affections, is he a surrogate Virro on which Naevolus can test out his argument? His opening line “you look more depressed than Marsyas after his flaying” (1–2) imports a frisson of (poetic) competition (Marsyas was a satyr who was flayed after losing to Apollo in a musical contest), and the satire as a whole replays discussions of the perverted patron–client relationship which dictates the career

<sup>15</sup> See Henderson (1999) on this aspect of Juvenal 1.

of poets as well as gigolos (Naevolus is a *cliens*, line 59). Lines 9–10 (“you used to be a dinner-table wit”) look like a classic *poetic* put-down coming from a satirist. In lines 35–6 (“however much Virro may have drooled over your naked charms”) *te* might well refer to Juvenal rather than being used impersonally, designed to prick his speaking partner’s empathy, and by line 46, it is a moot point who *tu* is (is this Virro speaking to Naevolus, Juvenal to Naevolus, or Naevolus to Juvenal?).<sup>16</sup> Modern editions which insert quotation marks and speakers in the margins elide this insecurity. Now Juvenal can always play Odysseus in this dialogue, the epic hero who escapes the Sirens unscathed: Naevolus’ song is told for him alone (*solī tibi*, 93). Yet we might also recall that the Siren song in *Odyssey* 12 is made up of “twin voices”: is it Juvenal’s readers who risk being bewitched by this double act? Listening to sordid gossip is painful, and unavoidable: there will always be some drunk ready to pour it into your wretched and reluctant ear (*nolentem et miseram uinosus inebriet aurem*, 113).

### Mirror shields

At this point, you might not recognize the “serious moralist” that many critics until recently have found in Juvenal.<sup>17</sup> The satirist is never a well-adjusted saint, more a self-implicated leech. Hence the sticky layers of Juvenal’s humor, which goes far beyond farcical hyperbole, acid rhetoric, or hilarious juxtaposition. Nor does the “irony” which critics have argued marks the later satires (when Juvenal’s trademark *indignatio* becomes *passé*)<sup>18</sup> start at satire 7. Throughout the satires, the victim is usually also the villain, the satiric persona alternately (and indecipherably) our ally and adversary, even within the same poem. Characters who might at first sight look like the common-sense preacher, the purveyor of home truths with whom we agree and identify, turn out to be bigoted freaks or superficial no-hopers who end up confusing readers over *which* ideas they should and should not agree with. It is a fine line, and the trick is that there’s no opting out (that’s the catch-22 of tyranny): *everyone* is invested in social politics, everyone (today, too) has an opinion on immigration, homosexuality, heredity, prostitution, adultery . . .

Hypocrisy will always get Juvenal a laugh.<sup>19</sup> The deflating punchline of satire 1, after Juvenal has claimed to be regurgitating Lucilian bombast, is

<sup>16</sup> See Habinek (in this volume) for discussion of how Naevolus resembles the archetypal satirist/Roman, while also being a figure for ridicule.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Courtney (1980) 31: “Juvenal presents himself as a serious moralist and critic of society.”

<sup>18</sup> See Braund (1988).

<sup>19</sup> On Juvenal’s “double irony” and self-exposure, see Fredericks (1975; 1979).

that freedom of speech is more curtailed than ever, and that therefore he will only dare to slander ghosts (1.170–1). Umbricius, Juvenal’s “friend” of satire 3, flees to Cumae (like Daedalus) to escape the lascivious Greek actor-types who have colonized Rome; yet those oiled-up Greeks are epitomized by the same mythic master craftsman who is also a well-worn figure for the wily poet in Latin literature (3.79–80). Pots calling kettles black is the subject of satire 2, which attacks those “serious moralists” oblivious to their own faults. But Juvenal dresses up as courtesan Laronia to make the bulk of his moralizing speech (2.36–63).<sup>20</sup> She argues that women, unlike the men who slander them, do not pretend to be experts in law or philosophy, or spin epic yarns (the accusatory spotlight is already bent back on the satirist here), or cross-dress in chiffon while they prosecute. Like this image of the lawyer in a *négligée*, Juvenal’s joke at his own expense is transparently obvious: he is himself a man wearing a woman’s cloak as he speaks. How do we read the rabid misogyny of satire 6 now? When Juvenal goes on to explain that the man who dresses up like a woman ends up like emperor Otho, who uses his shield as a mirror to check his reflection before battle (v. 99–103), this becomes the ultimate metaphor for the Juvenalian pose: the weapon which deflects criticism in satire’s epic arena is also the tool for indulgent self-exposure.<sup>21</sup> We might compare the vanity of Juvenal-as-Lucilius at the end of satire 1, swinging satire’s naked sword at mere ghosts, overdressed and overdone. As the subsequent line of satire 2 (which could read as this satirist’s aphorism) claims, “it takes a citizen of superlative guts to win Palace spoils on the field of *Bebriacum* and plaster his mug with face-pack” (105–6).

The middle poem of book 3, satire 8, is a minefield for readers.<sup>22</sup> Its subject of ancestry and the significance of names, triggered by the rhetorical question, *stemma quid faciunt?* “what good are family trees?” (1), is all encompassing. The speaker’s argument proves tricky to follow. First the message is that noblemen cannot rely on ancestry to win respect if they are not virtuous in their own lives. Names are highly unreliable tokens of status, as they can always be used ironically (we call the scabbiest cat “Tiger,” so when a man labels you “Lord,” be suspicious). Yet the protreptic at line 20, *nobilitas sola est atque unica uirtus*, can be read two ways: either “virtue is the one and only nobility,” or “nobility is the one and only virtue.” For at the same time

<sup>20</sup> On the figure of woman in Roman satire, see Henderson (1999) and Braund (1995). On Juvenal, *Sat.* 2 also see Gunderson in this volume.

<sup>21</sup> See Gunderson’s discussion (in this volume) of the satirist as a pervert who gets pleasure from lambasting the pleasures of others.

<sup>22</sup> On this satire, read Henderson (1997).

the addressee Ponticus is told to model his conduct on the patrician heroes (a Paulus, Cossus, or Drusus) whose *names* mark their illustrious military careers. The argument for ancestry's irrelevance, the analogy that the race-horse wins on speed, not birth certificate, is muddled by contradiction: we should not lean on borrowed glory, yet this satire is imbued with tradition, with political and literary history. Its roll call of heroes, all the great families of Rome from the Aemilii (3, 9) to the Iulii (242) takes its cue and (mock-) *gravitas* from epic texts;<sup>23</sup> the very idea that nobility consists in virtue not birth is a well-worn philosophical and rhetorical theme: *fama nobis tradit* (71), "fame/reputation handed this story down." The seediest tavern in town, where "privilege is abolished, and all men are free and equal" (177–8), is where the speaker's iconoclastic fantasies really wind up. No noble can retain his dignity: if he ditches his title, rebels against establishment pretense, he enrolls among the low-life of Lateranus' local; yet if he brandishes his ancestry (even if he proves himself virtuous, as Juvenal previously advises), the satirist can still expose him as a fake, for all Romans, like the scrawny cat named "Tiger," are mongrel offspring of Romulus and the convict mob he drew to swell the city of Rome (272–5). This poem displays how the satirist is split between his ambition to discredit predecessors to bolster his own prestige, and the necessity of buttressing poetic inheritance in order to define himself against it. He fractures dynasties and dismantles faces in stone (see II. 4–5, 18, 53, 77) at his own expense, as well as ours. And because questioning heredity, that is, delving into cultural values and identities, is so inflammatory a pastime, we might read Juvenal's advice to "set some curb on your anger" (*pone irae frenum modumque*, 88) as a patronizing ploy to let his audience's indignation replace the satirist's malice of satires 1–6. As critics have commented, despite the marked change of tone in the final three books, the veneer of Horatian restraint and politesse frequently cracks to reveal the old satiric fury.<sup>24</sup>

Juvenal makes it very difficult for readers to sum him up. As his satire rollercoasters through history and empire, and the decayed past meets a crumbling present, or a future doomed to rot, profound pessimism and even nihilism still make for a rollicking good read. Juvenal makes a "heads I win, tails you lose" politics serve as a recipe for seducing his captive audience: the more you get of him, the more you want (he brings out the imperialist in you), even if, like Trebius in satire 5, you are a fool to endure him more than once. Inevitably, it is the hope of a good meal that lures you on (*spes bene cenandi vos decipit*, 5.166).

<sup>23</sup> In particular Horace, *Odes* 1.12 and Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.756–886. See Henderson (1997).

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Conte (1994) 477.

*Further reading*

Peter Green's Penguin translation (1974) is excellent, and Latinists will probably find a combination of Courtney's (1980) and Ferguson's (1979) commentaries most useful. Also see commentaries by Braund (1996b), and on satires 1, 3 and 10 see N. Rudd and E. Courtney, *Juvenal: Satires 1, 11, x* (Bristol 1977). Excellent general works include Freudenburg (2001) 209–77, J. Bramble, "Juvenal and Martial," in Kenney and Clausen (1982), Gowers (1993a) 188–219, Anderson (1982) 197–254, and Braund (1996a): for a detailed explanation of stylistic features, with examples, see 17–29. On the later satires (7–16), see Braund (1988), and Henderson (1997). The following are illuminating articles on individual satires, in order of the satires they deal with: Kenney (1962) 29–40; Motto and Clark (1965) 267–76; Kilpatrick (1971) 229–41; J. G. Griffith (1969) "Juvenal, Statius and the Flavian Establishment," *Greece and Rome* 16: 134–50; P. F. Wilson (1995) "A Complete Catalogue of Sexist Slur: Juvenal's Sixth Satire and Bob Dylan's 'Just Like a Woman'," *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 20: 4–9; S. H. Braund (1992) "Juvenal: Misogynist or Misogamist?," *Journal of Roman Studies* 82: 71–86; Rudd (1976) 84–118; W. S. Anderson (1962) "The Programs of Juvenal's Later Books," *Classical Philology* 57: 145–60; M. Morford (1973) "Juvenal's Thirteenth Satire," *American Journal of Philology* 94: 26–36; W. S. Anderson (1988) "Juvenal Satire 15: Cannibals and Culture," in A. J. Boyle, ed. *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire*, 203–14 (Victoria, Australia).

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'The poor man's crushed corpse wholly disappears, just like his soul. At home meanwhile the folk, unwitting, are washing the dishes, blowing up the fire with distended cheek, clattering over the greasy flesh-scrapers, filling the oil-flasks and laying out the towels.' [22] At this feast cakes (liba) are provided; but the guests are expected to give a tip to the slaves. According to Duff, the client pays the slave, but is too indignant to take the cake. [23] Lit. "a slender flute-player"; props were so called either from their resemblance to a flute, or to the position in which the flute was held in playing. Juvenal and Persius with an English translation by G. G. Ramsay. Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England. "Poor Man's Feast is a wild ride with biting highs, withering lows, and tremendous wit and humor. But throughout, there is a great tenderness that is so consistently warm and moving that when the end came, as it was bound to, I found myself searching for even just a bit more, like picking up especially divine pastry crumbs with a moistened fingertip, before gently closing the covers. A beautiful story." - Deborah Madison, author of *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone*. "Poor Man's Feast is two overlapping love stories. It is a pleasure to get to live both at Altman's joyously, irreverently laid tab *Poor Man's Feast* book. Read 93 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. From James Beard Award-winning writer Elissa Altman comes a story ... Would *Poor Man's Feast* be a fully-satisfying literary meal or would it leave me hungry for more? I'm a big lover of food, finding great joy just pattering in my kitchen with a pot roast in my slow cooker and making and baking a couple dozen of my buttermilk cheesy biscuits. I'm also a big lover of memoirs of all kinds, thoroughly enjoying the stories of people from all walks of life with interesting stories to tell. So I was pretty thrilled to find *Poor Man's Feast* by food blogger Elissa Altman. Would *Poor Man's Feast* be a fully-satisfying literary meal or would it leave me hungry for more? 4 - The poor man's feast. from Part I - Satire as literature. By Victoria Rimell. Juvenal is the satirist of comparatives and superlatives. In exploiting hexameter satire's partnership with epic, he sets out to look bigger, denser, ruder, slyer, angrier, fleshier, more sophisticated and bilious, to the power of ten, than all the other satirists before him put together. Next to this heavyweight, Horace's bitter-sweet social commentary, or Persius' harsh medicinal concentrate, should begin to taste like very thin soup. Juvenal rejects outright Callimachean principles of slenderness, compression, and refinement, claiming instead to be driving his chariot down the track which