

Juvenal 3 and the Metapoetic Bully

Although scholars have discussed many of the different *personae* that Juvenal adopts to deliver his various satires, none have yet noted that the drunken bully of Juvenal's third satire is an alter ego for the poet. The bully can be read as a metapoetic figure, a proto-satirist who—like Juvenal himself—mocks the laughable Umbricius. In fact, the bully shares several traits with other satirist figures and satirical *personae* in the Roman tradition. A close reading of Umbricius' depiction of the bully (3.278-301) and a comparison to Horace's second book of satires, as well as the other poems in Juvenal's first book of satires, will demonstrate the similarities.

For example, the bully, drunk and impudent (278), tosses and turns in his bed if he has not had the opportunity to attack anyone (280). In fact, only a fight enables him to sleep (282). The situation is similar in satire II.1 of Horace, where the speaker declares that he cannot follow Trebatius' recommendation that he stop writing satire altogether and implies that it is the act of writing satire that enables him to sleep (5-7).

Next, like the speaker in Juvenal 1, who famously declares he will only attack the dead (1.170-1), the bully of Juvenal 3 avoids attacking the rich and powerful (282-5). However, he despises poor men like Umbricius, who must ration the wick of his lone candle (286-8). Although the majority of the satire consists of Umbricius' lengthy complaint about the miserable living and working conditions that have triggered his departure from the city of Rome, Braund and Freudenberg argue that Juvenal actually pokes fun at Umbricius himself in the views he is made to express and in the manner in which he is made to reveal them (Braund 1988 p. 12, Freudenberg 2001 p. 267-8). Similarly, the bully certainly finds the same man a good target for his satire. In particular, the bully accosts Umbricius in the street and belittles his simple food, his home, and his religion (292-4, 296). Of these topics, both food and religion are frequent targets of Roman satirists' wit. Horace and Juvenal, for example, mock the luxurious and excessive delicacies of the wealthy (Horace II.8, Juvenal 4 and 5), but Juvenal also satirizes the third-rate food served by a greedy patron to his clients (Juvenal 5 as well). Finally, the bully's questions about Umbricius' home and religion (296) portray the bully's victim as a Jewish beggar. These remarks thus recall the introductory lines of the satire, in which the speaker implies that the Jews in the grove of Egeria are all beggars (13-16). Indeed, Jews in general are also frequent targets of Roman satire, although most often they are targeted because of their superstitious behavior rather than any association with poverty. (Braund 1996, p. 177) The attack on Umbricius' lifestyle therefore reprises frequent satirical themes, and is delivered in an aggressive mode, one typical of Juvenal's first book of satires.

Thus the bully of Juvenal 3 exhibits traits similar to other satirist figures in the Horatian and Juvenalian *corpora*. Juvenal's bully merely bypasses the act of writing down his satire and instead begins with its verbal performance. (And, considering the equal emphasis placed on written composition and oral recitation of poetry in both Juvenal 1 and 7, such a performance is not out of character.) This metapoetic reading of Juvenal's third satire therefore allows us to read the bully as alter ego of the satirist, which has several interesting implications for an interpretation of the poem. First, the satirist is again emphasized as an urban creature, and Juvenal thus corrects the Horatian depiction of rural satire in satires I.5, II.3, and II.6. Second, the bully satirist allows Juvenal the opportunity to engage in metapoetic self-mockery by portraying the satirist as too timid to ever attack a target more powerful than he. Furthermore, the bully's successful routing of the ridiculous poor man (who meekly endures the abuse) can be

read as a bit of wishful thinking on Juvenal's part: here satire has teeth, and here it produces results—but only on a target as abject as the satirist himself.

Works Cited

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