

Exiling Mars: Gods and Disgraced Aristocrats in Juvenal's Rome

In the course of his poems, Juvenal (by which I mean the speaker of the poem) complains about many things that most of us would agree are outrageous, such as murder, fraud and some of the more notorious acts of various emperors. It is obvious how such misdeeds might harm the state and why even those not directly affected would cry foul. Yet Juvenal also attacks and castigates behavior that is strictly private and that does not obviously affect the public good, actions which might be acceptable in themselves but unacceptable for members of the elite, such as driving one's own chariot or other vehicle, performing on stage, or fighting in the arena. It has long been established that Roman elite ideology found these activities to be forms of class betrayal, perhaps even indications of an essentially servile nature. Juvenal takes this further, however, linking various activities together in an intricate web that connects class-betrayal of any sort to Rome's overall well-being and the relationship between the state and the gods.

This paper explores Juvenal's particular understanding of what was at stake in such acts of class betrayal by examining the detailed portraits of two men. The first is Lateranus in the eighth satire. Juvenal introduces him as a former consul who drives himself about and even saddles his own mule. This unseemly but relatively harmless hobby soon gives way to a portrait of Lateranus lolling about in a seedy dive, again an unseemly but hardly threatening way for Lateranus to spend his time. Yet the language used of Lateranus, his hobbies, and haunts reveals that in Juvenal's mind class betrayal of any sort is connected with religious betrayal of Rome's relationship with the gods. If he is, after all, a muleteer consul he must have a muleteer's divinity—the foreign goddess Epona. Moreover, his companions in the bar are hinted to be Jews.

This same connection between betrayal of one's own social status and the *pax deorum* is manifested in two separate portraits of Gracchus (in Satires 2 and 8). Gracchus represents social inversion as a general principle: he marries another man (as the bride), makes poor men rich, and fights in the arena as a gladiator. His own elite credentials are, however, impeccable: Gracchus has the bluest blood in Rome and is even one of the Salian priests. In both cases, Juvenal traces connections between individual disgrace and Rome's relationship to the gods as well as its prowess in war. This is accomplished through detailed images of the two as they go about their business: Lateranus as he drives around Rome and hangs out in bars and Gracchus at his wedding and in the arena. In the latter case, wedding veils, religious regalia, and gladiatorial equipment vie for attention as though they are all present at the same time. All of this culminates in the speaker's outraged demand that Mars leave Rome.

Most troubling for Juvenal is the realization that the gods may not care about such behavior after all and that his own standards of elite behavior are not shared by the elite themselves. The dire results predicted for the actions of men like Gracchus and Lateranus do not come to pass, and thus Juvenal's own understanding of how his world works is ultimately called into question.