

Camp Aesthetics and Queer Kinship in Juvenal's Ninth Satire

Written around 130 C.E., Juvenal's ninth satire portrays an elite Roman household in which a male sex worker provides pleasure to an effeminate, sexually submissive husband while fathering two children with the man's sexually frustrated wife. Because of its controversial subject matter, the poem was omitted from most 19th-century editions. In the 20th century, most responses to it were explicitly or implicitly homophobic, assuming that the poet must have abhorred homosexuality as a vice and that the poem must be an attack on homosexual behavior and persons. Taking a fresh look at the text through the lens of queer theory, I offer a reading of the poem as a campy exploration of social, cultural, and legal conditions that provide opportunities for unconventional formations of sex, gender and kinship.

This paper will necessarily be a top-line summary of a much longer argument, as "camp aesthetics" and "queer kinship" each receive an entire chapter in my dissertation-in-progress. In this paper, I will briefly summarize the unconventional ménage à trois at the heart of this highly controversial poem (Gilbert Highet called it "one of the most shocking poems ever written") and will provide a close reading of two passages: the subtly ironic opening speech by Juvenal and the fiercely vitriolic (and shockingly obscene) response by his interlocutor Naevolus, the Roman equivalent of a male escort who is both a notorious adulterer and a discrete (or so he pretends) bugger.

My notion that *camp*, a rhetorical style and discursive mode associated with queer culture primarily in the twentieth century, can reasonably and fruitfully be applied to an ancient Roman satire is necessarily controversial, and has already provoked quite a backlash in some academic forums (apparently *fama volabat* even to the bars and bistros of the Parisian Marais after the APA-LCC panel last winter; but I assure you this is a brand new paper.) But I soldier on nonetheless, refining my argument and making an ever stronger case for a queer reading of this patently nonnormative poem. Part of my task in this paper will be to explain what I mean by "queer" and "camp" and why I think these are useful paradigms with which to think about Juvenal's ninth satire.

Bibliography

- Anderson, W. S. 1982. *Essays on Roman Satire*. Princeton Series of Collected Essays. Princeton.
- Braund, S. M. 1988. *Beyond Anger: A Study of Juvenal's Third Book of Satires*. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge.
- Cleto, F. 1999. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Ann Arbor.
- Courtney, E. 1980. *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal*. London.
- Fögen, T. 2000. "Zwei Satiren Juvenals : Anmerkungen zur Homosexualität in der römischen Antike." In *Forum Homosexualität und Literatur*. Siegen. 63-74.
- Ferguson, J. 1979. *The Satires*. New York.
- Freudenburg, K. 2001. *Satires of Rome: Threatening Poses from Lucilius To Juvenal*. Cambridge.
- Freudenburg, K. 2005. *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*. Cambridge.

- Hallett, J. P., and M. B. Skinner. 1997. *Roman Sexualities*. Princeton.
- Highet, G. 1954. *Juvenal the Satirist, A Study*. Oxford.
- Larmour, D.H.J. 1991. "Juvenal, Ideology, and the Critics: A Plan for Resisting Readers." *Pacific Coast Philology* 26:41-50.
- Mason, H.A. 1962. "Is Juvenal a Classic?" *Arion* 1:39-79. Reprinted in *Critical Essays on Roman Satire*. Ed. J.P. Sullivan. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1999. 93-176.
- Miller, Paul Allen. 1998. "The Bodily Grotesque in Roman Satire: Images of Sterility." *Arethusa* 31: 257-283.
- Nappa, C. 2005. "Purchasing Manhood: Status and Virility in Juvenal's Ninth Satire." Paper delivered at the 101st Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. Madison, Wisconsin. March 30-April 2.
- Pryor, A.D. 1965. "Experiment and Sympathy in Juvenal 9." In *Aulla. Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Australasian Universities' Languages and Literature Association, Melbourne 19-26 August 1964*. Ed. Adams, M. Melbourne. 33-34.
- Richlin, A. 1992. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. New York.
- Richlin, A. 1993. "Not before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the Cinaedus and the Roman Law against Love between Men." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3: 523-573.
- Rosen, R. M. 2007. *Making Mockery: The Poetics of Ancient Satire*. Classical Culture and Society. Oxford.
- Walters, J. 1998. "Making a Spectacle: Deviant Men, Invective, and Pleasure." *Arethusa* 31:355-367.
- Williams, C. A. 1999. *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity. Ideologies of Desire*. Oxford