

Cannibalizing Ovid: Allusive Play in Juvenal's *Satire 15*

In *Satire 15*, a poem with cannibalism at its core, Juvenal gorges himself on Ovidian allusions. When faced with the extended, vivid description of cannibalism in the battle scene between two Egyptian tribes in Juvenal's *Satire 15*, scholars tend only to examine the literal, rather than the literary, nature of the event. On the contrary, I argue that the satire ought not be read as a straightforward account. The poem is a literary piece, and the poet bends the truth and uses various poetic devices to achieve a desired effect. Although Courtney, Hight and Anderson note various allusions within the text, they do not fully grapple with their presence within the satire. Juvenal saturates the satire with Ovidian intertexts, selecting morsels from his predecessor's scenes of immoderate violence and shifty narrators, as a way to critique contemporary life in Rome.

In this satire, Juvenal returns to the feast, a common topos for the "stuffed" genre of satire (*satura*), but unlike the feasts in his earlier satires, this one is disrupted in a wholly new way when the feasters become fed upon. The story of this violence is told by a voice that undercuts itself by framing the tale with references to lying narrators and mythical stories while filling it with Ovidian moments.

The frame of the satire itself is marked by allusions to characters the first and last books of the *Metamorphoses*, with references to Pyrrha near the beginning (30) and Pythagoras at the end (173). This allusive play continues in the descriptions of the acts of cannibalism in the satire. When an Egyptian tribe mounts an extended gory attack on a neighboring tribe, weakened and still reeling with drink following a banquet, we see references in feeling, situation and language to Ovid's description of battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs (*Met.* 12). In the heat of the brawl, Juvenal slyly includes a reference to the poet's name, with a stray *nasus* at the end of a line in the middle of the battle (*vix cuiquam aut nulli toto certamine nasus / integer.* 155). While the graphic description of this battle has led scholars to believe that Juvenal was an eyewitness, the story ends in utter ruin and thus lacks any real corroboration. This use of Ovid extends even to digressions: when Juvenal interrupts his battle narrative for a brief moralistic aside (84-87), he alludes to Ovid once again (*Met.* 10.306). Thus the abundance of Ovidian parallels begins to subvert Juvenal's stance as a trustworthy narrator. But he does not stop here: the next scene of cannibalism, among the famished Vascones, echoes Ovid's telling of the famished Erysichthon (*Met.* 8). Finally, in the last segment of the poem (160-65), before he

mentions Pythagoras' name, Juvenal moralizes about beasts in a speech that is modeled on Ovid's words for Pythagoras (*Met.* 15. 83-87), but deliberately twists it, making counterintuitive claims about the relationships between animals, undermining our trust in the narrator.

As Juvenal gnaws on the marrow of Ovidian parallels throughout *Satire 15*, he belches out distortions. Through multiple allusions he situates deplorable acts within a Roman mythic context, bringing the foreign bloodbath home.

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