

Caedens Dicere Verum: Juvenal's Use of Vergil in Satire II

Juvenal's second satire is a little read and studied poem: its virulent and graphic homophobia keeps it off class syllabi and is quite at odds with modern tastes. While students of the history of sexuality have studied the sexual rhetoric and assumptions of Juvenal's poem, in this paper I read the effeminacy and homosexuality that Juvenal decries as symptomatic of the corruption and taint of the rule of Domitian and show how the satirist makes use of a combined allusion to Vergil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* to compare Domitian's reign to the plague of *Georgics* 3 and to show its deleterious effects on Rome are directly opposed to the fertility and health of the Augustan age, as conceived by the Augustan poets.

The age of Domitian sought to promote a new and even better golden age through the propaganda of its monumental projects, such as correcting the sundial of Augustus, while he literature of the age, such as Statius 1.6, contribute to this idea with its proclamations of a new, better golden age. I examine Juvenal's response to this program primarily through two passages in his second satire: the first is a reference to a contagion of immorality at 2.78-81 that draws upon a double allusion to Vergil's *Georgics* and *Eclogues*. First, to the plague in *Georgics* 3 and then to the explanation in the ninth *Eclogue* of how the star of Caesar increases fertility. This double allusion inherits ideas from the Hellenistic literature of the court of the Ptolemies that linked their reigns to fecundity, agricultural and otherwise. Next, I use this illusion to illuminate a second passage earlier passage, a direct reference to Domitian at 2.29-33 (the enforced abortions of his niece, Julia). This image paints Domitian as a sort of anti-Ptolemy, negating fertility and spreading corruption. These passages, combined with references to the Julian gens (the *lex Julia*, indeed Julia herself) create a strategy in which Juvenal measures the Flavians

against the Augustan standard they claim to be surpassing in their own literature and monumental projects, and condemns them by that very standard.

Domitian emerges as a plague bearing monster aborting the fertile promise of the golden age of the Julian gens, transforming Rome into a twisted reflection of the *caput mundi*, from whence all immorality spreads. This paper thus sheds light on the use of plague as a poetic trope, the reception of Vergil in Juvenal's poetry as it offers a new interpretation of Juvenal's second satire.

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