

### Sleepless in Urbe: The Language of Insomnia in Juvenal *Satire 3*

Scholars have previously noted how the satirist Juvenal follows the long tradition of ancient authors in disguising his personal wealth with that of *personae*. To avoid problems with class distinction, the Roman satirist Juvenal creates *personae* of individuals with seemingly less affluent backgrounds and more critical perspectives to allow him to focus on aspects of Roman life that cross socio-economic lines. One such aspect this paper explores is Juvenal's complaint about sleep deprivation through the *persona* of Umbricius and how this insomnia is in direct correlation to this character's social status. Specifically, I will focus on the satirist's language of sleep deficiency so prominent in his portrayal of city life in *Satire 3*. By analyzing this language, I will demonstrate how Juvenal critiques the failings of major societal systems within Rome, such as the patron-client system, and show how Juvenal represents both the literal and metaphoric crumbling of Rome.

Gold (1998) describes the Subura, where the *insulae* are located, as "the least desirable place imaginable" (58), and "the embodiment of all that is wrong with the city" (60). The instability of the *insulae*, or housing tenements, are a contributing factor to Umbricius' inability to sleep. Umbricius states "*securos pendente iubet dormire ruina*", "he orders (us) to sleep secure with ruin hanging (over us)" (*Sat.* 3.197) The juxtaposition of the first and last words, *securos* and *ruina*, demonstrates the irony of the order. Juvenal makes it clear that with *ruina* comes a lack of *securitas*, and a lack of *securitas* means that there will be no sleep. How exactly is a person supposed to sleep securely while ruin hangs over them? This use of *ruina* in line 197 is to be compared to its use in line 190 when Umbricius asks "*quis timet aut timuit gelida Praeneste ruinam*", "who fears or has feared ruin in cool Praeneste?" (*Sat.* 3.190). Readers are reminded that collapse is not an issue outside of Rome proper, and while *ruina* is used ironically

with *securus* in 197, it is implied that there exists a sense of *securitas* outside of Rome, whether it be in affluent Praeneste, or even in Gabii (*Sat.* 3.192), where a person can actually sleep securely without a fear of ruin.

City noise is another underlying cause of sleep deprivation. Umbricius makes an interesting point with this, he states that “*magnis opibus dormitur Urbe*”, “with great wealth one sleeps in the City” (*Sat.* 3.235), but then three lines later claims that the sounds in the street “*eripient somnum Druso*”, “they will certainly snatch sleep from Drusus” (*Sat.* 3.238). Line 235 points out that the privilege of sleep belongs to those who can afford houses. In her commentary Braund (1996) states in reference to *dormitur* that this line is “a grandiloquent declaration of the inequity of life in Rome, with the grand impersonal passive” (215). Although it is not out of character for Juvenal’s Umbricius to point out the inequalities mentioned in line 235, what is surprising is the statement made in line 238, namely that city noise deprives not just poorer citizens of sleep, but even the emperor Drusus, who Braund (1996) remarks is often thought to be the emperor Claudius (216).

The two examples above illuminate the literal and metaphoric failings of Rome. The crumbling *insulae* not only represent the literal collapse of poorer citizen’s shelter, a fundamental necessity, but also the failing of one of the most central social relationships in Rome, the patron-client system. Additionally, through Umbricius, Juvenal makes it clear that it is no longer simply the poor who are suffering from these failings, but now the wealthy suffer too, which reveals how far Rome has fallen.

## Bibliography

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