

MONEY, MARIUS PRISCUS, AND *INFAMIA* IN JUVENAL'S FIRST SATIRE

That Juvenal rails against greed and miscarriages of justice will surprise no one, but often, amid critics' general acknowledgment of these phenomena as targets of Juvenalian venom, detailed analysis of particular examples is missing. Here I propose to look at two brief exempla from the first Satire as an example of how Juvenal's verbal artistry very concisely and effectively articulates the poet's themes.¹ These two closely related exempla are crystallized, in Juvenal's verbal play, into an image that would have been familiar to Juvenal's contemporaries: a specific type of Roman coin.

At 1.45–50, the speaker begins describing his anger at certain examples of vice.²

*quid referam quanta siccum iecur ardeat ira,
cum populum gregibus comitum premit hic spoliator
pupilli prostantis et hic damnatus inani
iudicio? quid enim saluis infamia nummis?
exul ab octava Marius bibit et fruitur dis
iratis, at tu uictrix, prouincia, ploras.*

[1.45–50]

1) Except when it must obviously refer to the historical author, I use the name Juvenal and the terms 'satirist' and 'poet' all to refer to the speaking character who speaks each poem. This character may or may not resemble the historical author. Persona theory, rooted in the work of scholars of English satire such as Alvin Kernan (see, for example, A. Kernan, *The Cankered Muse: Satires of the English Renaissance* [New Haven 1959]) was brought into the study of Roman satire by W. S. Anderson, starting with W. S. Anderson, *Studies in Book I of Juvenal*, *YCLS* 15 (1957) 33–90; see especially W. S. Anderson, *Roman Satirists and Literary Criticism*, *Bucknell Review* 12 (1964) 106–13. These and other relevant essays are collected in W. S. Anderson, *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton 1982). Other important contributions to persona theory in the study of Juvenal are M. M. Winkler, *The Persona in Three Satires of Juvenal* (Hildesheim 1983) and S. Braund, *Beyond Anger: A Study of Juvenal's Third Book of Satires* (Cambridge 1988). Even now, however, not everyone accepts the idea that the speaking persona is not simply the voice of the author; see especially J. Iddeng, *Juvenal, Satire, and the Persona Theory: Some Critical Remarks*, *SO* 75 (2000) 104–29; R. Mayer, *Persona (I) Problems*, *MD* 50 (2003) 55–80; and F. Bellandi, *Naevolus Cliens*, in: M. Plaza (ed.), *Persius and Juvenal* (Oxford 2009) 504.

2) W. S. Anderson, *Anger in Juvenal and Seneca*, *California Publications in Classical Philology* 19 (1964) 127–96 and id., *Lascivia vs. ira: Martial and Juvenal*, *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 3 (1970) 1–34 are the classic discussions of anger in Juvenal; each appears also in W. S. Anderson, *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton 1982) at 198–209 and 362–95 respectively.

Why should I explain how great the anger is with which my dry liver burns, when this man, who robs his ward into prostitution, oppresses the people with his entourage of goons, and this one has been “condemned” in trial with no real effect? For what does disgrace mean if his money’s safe? Marius the exile drinks starting at the eighth hour and profits from the angry gods, but you, victorious province, are weeping.

These lines continue two ideas that were introduced earlier in the poem (e. g., 1.33–36,37–44): profiting from immoral actions (here stealing from one’s charge) and the displacement of decent people – phrased in a way that is simultaneously literal and metaphorical, for as the man walks through town with his huge entourage he oppresses the people, like a tyrant, but also literally presses them by forcing them aside. The one word *prostantis* adds a crucial detail: the man who has embezzled from his ward has reduced the youth to such poverty that he becomes a prostitute.³ This indicates yet another social inversion, for just as rightful heirs are displaced by gigolos in verses 37–44, here a young man is reduced in wealth and social standing by the guardian who should have protected both his money and his morals. Prostitution, while perfectly legal in most cases, incurred the penalty known as *infamia*, a reduction in civil rights and legal protections for those who practiced disgraceful professions, such as prostitution, fighting in the arena (for the freeborn), or acting.⁴

The next portrait, an excellent example of the poet’s skill as an artist, also deals with *infamia*. The other man who makes Juvenal’s “dry liver burn with anger” has been tried and convicted, but he suffers no punishment that really matters. The legal penalties and the resulting disgrace are meaningless, says Juvenal, because his money is safe. The apparently anonymous example suddenly becomes specific, and we are presented with Marius Priscus, prosecuted successfully in 100 CE by Tacitus and Pliny the Younger for extortion of the provincials during his term as governor of Africa.⁵ Though Marius lost and Africa, represented by the consuls, won, Marius is still rich and still having a good time in exile.⁶ The rest of the description

3) It is also possible to take the force of *prostantis* somewhat differently, namely to suggest that the *spoliator* profits from the youth’s prostitution. Perhaps there is even a suggestion of both: the *spoliator* has embezzled from the boy and is still making money from his activities now that he has become a prostitute.

4) A good introduction to the concept of *infamia* is C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 1993) 123–26. The classic discussion of the legal aspects is A. H. J. Greenidge, *Infamia; its Place in Roman Public and Private Law* (Oxford 1894). References to further discussions can be found in E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London 1980) 96. The entry in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines d’après les textes et les monuments* (Paris 1877–1919) s. v. *infamia* is still useful.

5) The details of the prosecution are well summarized by Courtney (n. 4 above) 96. The proceedings are described by Pliny, *Ep.* 2.11; see also *Ep.* 6.19.9.

6) Although it would be hard to prove an intentional reference here, one is tempted to think of Milo’s famous reply to Cicero upon receipt of the revised text of the *Pro Milone*: ὁ Μίλων τῷ λόγῳ πεμφθέντι οἱ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐντυχῶν (ἐπεφυγάδευτο γὰρ) ἀντεπέστειλε λέγων ὅτι ἐν τύχῃ αὐτῷ ἐγένετο τὸ μὴ ταῦθ’ οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ δικαστηρίῳ λεχθῆναι· οὐ γὰρ ἂν τοιαύτας ἐν τῇ Μασσαλίᾳ, ἐν ἧ κατὰ τὴν φυγὴν ἦν, τριγῶλας ἐσθίειν, εἶπερ τι τοιοῦτον ἀπελελόγητο. “Milo, upon receiving the speech

is just as important, and even more unexpected. Marius “profits from the angered gods” (*fruitur dis iratis*), a striking and brilliant phrase. Marius lives it up with impunity though the gods are angry, and the paradox of the phrase, highlighted by the enjambment of *iratis*, calls into question the effectiveness and relevance of the gods’ anger, just as the *inane iudicium* that supposedly punished Marius represents the futility of human justice.⁷ Next another paradox: while the punished Marius lives on in wealth and comfort, the victor is left weeping. The victor in the case against Marius is the province of Africa, represented by Pliny and Tacitus, and the language here is suggestive as well as paradoxical. The image of the weeping province suggests coins that celebrate Roman victories by representing provinces as desolate women, the most famous of which is undoubtedly the *Iudaea capta* coin that commemorated Titus’ victory in the Jewish War.⁸ Such a coin suggests the victor by showing the defeated, but, in saying that the victorious Africa weeps, Juvenal suggests that here the victor is the defeated.

That the language is suggestive of this type of iconography is important. What has rendered the successful prosecution of the criminal Marius *inane* (“ineffective”, literally “empty”) is the fact that he remains wealthy. *Infamia*, disgrace, does not touch him because “his coins are safe” (*quid enim saluis infamia nummis?*). The well-known trial of an extortionist governor has demonstrated that there is no justice where the rich are concerned. Marius’ loss in the trial is transformed into a kind of propagandistic image asserting his victory over a defeated province. The word *nummus* has suggested coinage, and the language of coin legends has made the picture vivid, but the image itself is important for another reason also. All of the themes of the poem so far come together in one very accessible image, for a coin is something that can be held in the hand easily. Marius has been linked closely with the man who steals from his ward and forces the youth into prostitution. The two together represent not only the lengths people will go to for money but also the effect on the victim, and we are left with money’s power to corrupt and to ruin emblemized in the image of a coin. Juvenal’s anger over the immorality around him is in large measure frustration over the power of money and the lack, as he sees it, of human or divine guarantees, a theme that recurs frequently through the Satires, especially in Satire 13, a mock *consolatio* in which the frivolity of believing that there is either honesty or justice in financial matters is one of the speaker’s main arguments.⁹

which had been sent to him by [Cicero] – for he had been exiled – wrote back, saying that it was lucky for him that these things had not been delivered in court in this way, for he would not have eaten such red mullets in Massilia (where he was in exile) if his defense had been any such thing” (Cassius Dio 40.54.3–4). Dio’s further account suggests that Milo’s response was bitterly sarcastic.

7) On the way that the rhythm of these lines underscores the jarring nature of what is described – namely that someone derives pleasure in the face of divine anger – see S. M. Braund, *Juvenal: Satires Book 1* (Cambridge 1996) 88.

8) For this type of coin, with some illustrations, see S. W. Stevenson / C. Roach Smith / F. W. Madden, *A Dictionary of Roman Coins: Republican and Imperial* (London 1889) under *Germania capta*, *Iudaea capta*, *Iudaea capta S. C.* and *Parthia capta*.

9) Useful studies of Satire 13 that engage with the *consolatio* model are L. Edmunds, *Juvenal’s Thirteenth Satire*, *RhM* 115 (1972) 59–73; M. Morford, *Juvenal’s*

Anger has been explicitly mentioned twice in six lines. Outrage over rich criminals makes Juvenal's dry liver burn, and, as commentators note, it is not only the word *ira* that denotes anger here: the verb *ardeat* ("blazes"), the dry liver (*siccum iecur*) and the modifier *quanta* ("how great") all work together with the word *ira* to suggest particularly intense, perhaps even overwhelming outrage.¹⁰ But while we sympathize with Juvenal's anger here, we are reminded by the striking paradox *fruitur dis / iratis* that even divine anger may be rendered useless, and the image of a single inscribed coin is a brilliant device, providing as it does a (literally) handy explanation of what has rendered the gods' anger ineffective. If the power of money is great enough to offset divine anger, how can Juvenal's *ira* resist? The anger of our satirist may be in some measure righteous indignation, but it may well be futile.

The futility of the satirist's anger, despite the fact that it parallels that of the gods, replays a larger dynamic of the first satire in general, and one central to its meaning and programmatic function. For in Satire 1, Juvenal lays claim to being a new Lucilius, but his bold assertion that, like Lucilius, he will fearlessly name names is immediately and decisively refuted. He ends by conceding that he will only attack those safely dead and buried. Satire 1 depicts a world in which money converts (legal) losers like Marius Priscus into winners and victorious provinces into defeated ones, even as it renders the moral and legal status of *infamia* meaningless and the anger of gods and satirists alike impotent.

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Thirteenth Satire, *AJPh* 94 (1973) 26–36; S. Braund, A Passion Unconsoled? Grief and Anger in Juvenal "Satire" 13, in: S. Braund / C. Gill (eds.), *The Passions in Roman Literature and Thought* (Cambridge 1997) 68–88; and C. Keane, Philosophy into Satire: The Program of Juvenal's Fifth Book, *AJPh* 128 (2007) 30–35.

10) See, e. g., Braund (n. 7 above) 87 on 1.45. For the liver as the seat of anger see Courtney (n. 4 above) 95.